

People's strategies for change

An appraisal of the Dalit-struggle for dignity and rights



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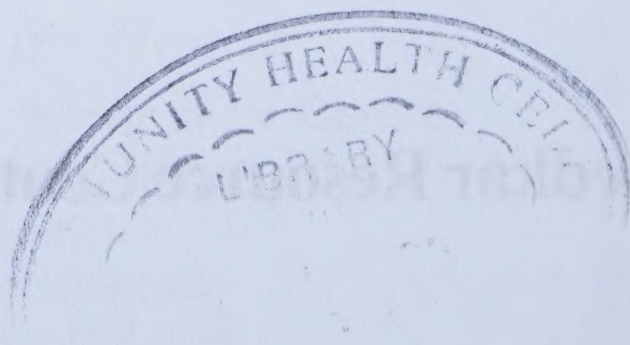
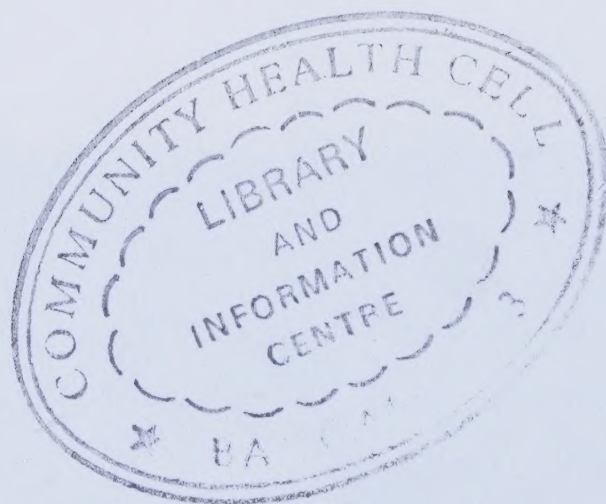
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Preface and acknowledgements

Preface

During my work for Amnesty International I learned for the first time about the existence of the Dalits and their struggles. I was shocked to hear that so many people still live in a state of 'hidden apartheid', where their human rights are systematically violated. In June 2000 Amnesty International built a 'Dalit square' at a cultural festival where 140.000 people attended. Amnesty International invited two Dalit-activists to come over from India to address the crowd. They held strong speeches and encouraged the crowd into sending SMS protest-messages with their mobile phones to the Prime Minister and other government officials in India. In the end more then 12.000 SMS-messages were sent. The two Dalit-activists were Mr. M.C. Raj and his wife Mrs. Jyothiraj.

After the cultural festival Mr. M.C. Raj and Mrs. Jyothiraj invited me to come to India because it would be good for my experience and my further work as a human rights activist if I learned more about activism at the grassroots. I accepted their invitation and went to India to stay at their organization. Their organization is called REDS (Rural Education for Development Society) and it is a grass-root level organization that works for the Dalits. REDS supports the people's movement Dalit Jagruti Samithi (DJS) that works among the Dalits in the villages. For six months I stayed with REDS and DJS in the town of Tumkur in Karnataka, South India.

The idea of writing a document about people's strategies for change was suggested to me by Mr. M.C. Raj. A document about this subject could be a useful tool for national and international lobbying and advocacy.

I started out with the intention of writing a document that would only describe REDS and its strategies, instruments and mechanisms. But after interviews with intellectuals and social activists it slowly but gradually started to grow into a document that encompassed all the important strategies that individuals and organizations nowadays use to support the Dalits.

REDS was my home-base for the research. From REDS I undertook fieldtrips to the villages in Tumkur-district and trips to Bangalore and beyond, to visit libraries and conduct interviews. I talked to the Dalits in the villages about their struggles, their hopes and their actions for a better life. In spite of the communication difficulties I learned much from the Dalit-leaders of DJS. They told me their life-stories and showed me what their day-to-day work in the villages meant. I attended the seminar and festivals they organized and they talked to me about how they solve issues. The interviews with intellectuals and social activists contributed an essential part in my knowledge about Indian society and Dalit-issues. Topics in many an interview went far beyond the scope of my research and led to interesting discussions. The libraries at REDS, the Indian Social Institute and United Theological College gave me access to the much needed theoretical information that would make the document substantial.

The actual writing of the document was a race against time in the form of the expiration date of my visa. But in end the document was finished in time and has culminated in the printing of this book. The book offers an introduction to the Dalit-situation and an overview of the strategies that people follow to help the Dalits. I can say that I am very happy with the result and I think it is, in its own right a useful contribution to the Dalit-struggle. I cannot leave unmentioned that all profits of this booklet will go to the International Dalit Cultural Center, Booshakthi Kendra, which will be founded in the near future close to Bangalore.

Acknowledgements

The persons who made my experience in India possible have to be thanked first, Mr. M.C. Raj and Mrs. Jyothiraj. They invited me to come to India because they thought it would be good for me. They were absolutely right. I thank them for their hospitality, the time they took to share their knowledge and experience and for everything else they have done for me.

All my family and friends I thank for their moral and financial support in the six months that I stayed in India. They more than once suggested that it might be better for me to come home (because of the imminent war with Pakistan). But not wanting to give up that easily, their suggestions made me even more resolute in staying.

I want to thank the following people because they took all the time to give answers to my questions during the interviews. Mr. C.S. Dwarkanath, Professor Jeevan Kumar, Dr. Nagari Babaiah, Father Albert, Mr. Desrochers, Umesh, Sister Aida and leaders of DMC, Mr. Prabhakar, David and Mercy, Ruth Manorama, Mr. Neelaiah, Mr. V.T Rajshekar, Fr. Ambrose Pinto.

My gratitude also goes to the staff of REDS, the leaders of DJS and the people in the villages for taking me up in their communities. The DJS-leaders took me by the hand and made me experience the live of the Dalit-people in the villages and they showed me first hand the process of change that their people's movement created.

My partner Saartje (Sarah for the people that have met her in Tumkur) gets special thanks. Of course for the discussions and the feedback on my document in the difficult stages. But more important for staying with me in India although you were on the other side of the world.

Without all of you this book would not have been printed, thank you.

Dave Hardy
Tumkur, Karnataka

Part one

Introduction to the Dalit situation

Introduction

This country which demands

A pot of blood

For a swallow of water

How can I call it mine

Though it gives the world

The (empty) advice of peace¹

The post-independent period has witnessed some impressive achievements in India. India is now a country with a booming IT-sector, its infrastructure is developing rapidly and the national income shows substantive annual growth. The promise of fundamental rights in the constitution and in international human rights treaties make India a civilized country. At least, if the promise of equality for all civilians is enough to make a country called civil. Because in spite of the post-independent economic growth and the promise of human rights, India is still one of the poorest countries in the world, with a very bad human rights record.

The theoretical protection of human rights has not put an end to structural human rights violations of a group of an estimated 240 million people. These people are the Dalits. They have been oppressed for more than 3000 years and neither the constitution nor treaties such as the International Covenant on Economical, Social and Cultural rights have been able to make significant changes. The status of Dalits is up till now far below any humanitarian standard set in all the legislations. The violations are not incidental but systematic and structural. Every day Dalits are murdered, raped and their houses are set on fire. They lack proper education, health-care, food and working conditions.

Why is this still happening in India in the twenty-first century? Some of the main reasons are the ongoing humiliating influences of the caste-system and the unwillingness of the government to make changes.

How do people respond to this ongoing oppression of the Dalits? Many people sit back and wait for the national and local government to make amends. Some people however look at the failure of the state to ensure effective development of the Dalits and decide to take a pro-active stand. They take up action themselves and put pressure on the government to compel it to help the Dalits. Where pressure on the government is to no avail they realize changes themselves. People all over India have chosen this option. The poor standards of bureaucratic performing and political insincerity, insensitivity of the planning and delivery system have been a source of inspiration to the rise of activism that strives towards Dalit-liberation.²

People who take up action themselves follow different roads in their search for Dalit-liberation. In this document the different roads are called 'people's strategies for change'. In the past six months a study has been carried out to discover the most important strategies that people use to help the Dalits in their struggle for human rights. The people in the study are individuals (i.e. social activists and intellectuals) and groups (i.e. NGO's, political parties) who have consciously taken up the Dalit cause and want to move social development of Dalits in a specific desired direction.³ As their strategies are developed and used by the people and not by the government they are called 'people's strategies for change'.

The study has discovered twelve 'people's strategies for change'.

- Activate Dalit-support in the international community
- Change the identity of the Dalits

- Use information and communication in the Dalit-struggle
- Cooperate in the Dalit-struggle
- Generate a Dalit counter-discourse
- Create awareness about the Dalit-situation
- Develop the Dalits economically
- Improve the social welfare status of the Dalits
- Organize the Dalits
- Empower the Dalits politically
- Seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights
- Train the Dalits

The study culminated in the writing of this document. This document offers an introduction to the Dalit situation and it gives an overview of how people support the Dalits in their struggle.

This document consists of three parts. The first part gives background information on the Dalit situation. Besides this introduction the first part shows the history of the Dalits, Dalit human rights, violations of their rights, the reasons for the gap between promise and practice and the people that decide to stand up and fight.

The second part of this document describes the outcome of the study on 'people's strategies for change'. The twelve strategies are illustrated in twelve chapters. Each chapter explains why a strategy helps the Dalits and it shows how it is used. The strategies are clarified with concrete examples.

The third part of this document contains the conclusion, and it gives a brief glance of the future of the Dalit struggle in the description of Booshakthi Kendra. Booshakthi Kendra is the International Dalit Cultural Center that will be founded in the near future. All profits of this book will be contributed to the founding of that center.



History of the Dalits

More than three thousand years ago the subjugation-process of the people we now call Dalits is believed to have started. Since there is no clear written history scholars have developed different theories about how and why the Dalits became the oppressed people. One aspect that is widely accepted though is that an external group (many call them the Aryans) invaded India over 3000 years ago. In the course of time they conquered the entire sub-continent and started suppressing the indigenous people.

A view in the same line of thought expresses that: “originally, there was neither consciousness of castes, nor limitations of marriages within the three Aryan social classes, nor taboos like with whom one could eat. Professions were not hereditary. However, once Aryan ascendancy was complete, in order to preserve their ethnic purity and superiority, the Aryans created caste structures and treated the aborigines as beyond the social and religious pale and prohibited social intercourse, for example marriages. The treatment of the aborigines and Aryan-aborigine mixtures was contemptuous and they were called *Dasas*, literally meaning slaves. The *Dasas* were prohibited from participating in Vedic rituals, yet they were allowed to worship their own gods and goddesses within the larger Hindu religious concept.”⁴

In the course of hundreds of years the indigenous people were slowly but gradually coopted into the Hindu-religion. Through a process of internalization they started to believe in the Brahminical rhetoric of purity and impurity.⁵ As a result the indigenous people accepted their role as ‘untouchables’. Hindu scriptures like the Vedas and Manusmriti played an important role in this internalization process because they ascribed the degrading position in society to the ‘untouchables’. These scriptures formulated a Brahminical normative order that describes the place, role and tasks of the Dalits in the social (caste) system.

Resistance of 'untouchables' was either oppressed violently or overcome through the process of cooptation. A good example of cooptation is Buddha who, according to Hindu-religion, is an incarnation of a Hindu-god.

In the beginning of the 20th century the British Census Commissioners in India wanted clarity on the question who were Hindu and who were dubiously Hindu. With questions such as "Will clean castes take water from them?" they started dividing communities in Hindus and 'Depressed classes' or 'Exterior Castes' (the 'untouchables'). This made the 'untouchables' visible as a legitimate and identifiable social category. They became a political collectivity that was entitled to the kind of advantages bestowed on other groupings.⁶

In 1935 the term Scheduled Castes (SC's) was introduced by the Government of India Act. In establishing a scheme to legitimize who is entitled to benefits, such as reservation of seats, 'schedules' of caste names were drawn up. The term SC is still the official legal category for the 'untouchables'.

From the 1960's Dalit writers started using the word Dalit as an alternative to the dominant caste names such as 'untouchable' and Harijan. With the action group Dalit Panthers using the prefix Dalit to assert their identity the word gained more popularity as a name to be proud of and a name of resistance. Although opinion nowadays differs on which communities exactly are Dalit it is now the most common term in public discourse to identify the 'untouchables'. It is also a symbol of a group that struggles for change and revolution.⁷ A mark of a people that sustained themselves despite Brahminic onslaught on their humanity. A people among whom tolerance and resilience slowly have turned into strength and self-assertion.⁸



Dalit Rights are Human Rights

In 1947 India became an independent state, which meant it could determine its own future. The start of the new nation looked promising enough for the Dalits. The Dalits had a powerful leader in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who fought against all tides to give India a constitution that promised a country of equality, liberty and fraternity for ALL people. It is because of Ambedkar's constant struggle that the problem of untouchability was brought on the national scene and as a result Gandhi, the Congress and the British Government had to accept the problems of the Dalits.⁹ A major victory for Ambedkar and the Dalits was the constitution formally abolishing untouchability. Article 17 of the Indian Constitution says: "Untouchability is abolished. Its practice in any form is forbidden. Violators will be punished in accordance with law." Other articles formulate additional fundamental rights for Dalits in all major areas of concern. The constitution also grants special positive provisions for Scheduled Castes, such as reservation of seats in parliament.

In the decades after independence the Indian government formulates numerous acts and ratifies several international treaties guaranteeing protection of human rights. These acts and treaties contain general human rights legislation but also specific protection for Dalits.

Some important treaties and acts are the:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948
- Anti-Untouchability-Act 1955
- Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) 1965
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966

- UN Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1967
- Protection of Civil Rights Act 1976
- Bonded Labor (Abolition) Act 1976
- Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 & Rules 1995 (POA)
- Protection of Human Rights Act 1993
- Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993

All these treaties and acts and the programs based on this legislation hold much needed protection for Dalits. They protect the Dalit rights in all major areas of concern. These major areas are the following (including some examples of human rights from the national and international level):

Right to livelihood

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of herself/himself and of her/his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services. (UDHR)

Right to gender equity

Any non-SC/ST person that assaults or uses force to any SC/ST woman with intent to dishonour or outrage her modesty or being in position to dominate the will of a SC/ST woman and uses this position to exploit her sexually to which she would not have otherwise agreed shall be punishable with imprisonment.... (POA ACT)

Right to land and labour

The State shall ensure that ownership and control of resources are distributed and shall ensure that no concentration of wealth and means of productions takes place. (Indian Constitution)

The State shall secure to all workers a living wage, conditions

of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure, and social and cultural opportunities (Indian Constitution)

Right to education

The State shall promote with special care the educational interests of SC's. (Indian Constitution)

Right to employment and reservations

Everybody has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, to protections against unemployment. (ICESCR)

Right to life and security

Do not subject any person to any disability, liability, restriction or condition on grounds only of religion, race, caste... with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of worship and with regard to the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort. (Indian Constitution)¹⁰

It can be concluded that in (legal) theory the Dalits are guaranteed many, if not all, important human rights; civil, political, economical, social and cultural.



Human rights violations on Dalits

In spite of the national and international commitment of India to protect human rights, the years since independence have not brought a substantial better life for the Dalits. Human rights violations on Dalits continue on a large scale. The violations are not small and incidental but they are blatant violations that occur in a structural manner in all fields of the human rights spectrum. Every

hour 2 Dalits are assaulted; every day 3 Dalit-women are raped; every day 2 Dalits are murdered; every day 2 Dalit houses are burnt. A quick glance at the newspapers provides the proof.

Bangalore, April 24, 2002 (Deccan Herald), Attack on Dalit in Bellary

Vinod, who is a 'pygmy', was assaulted on Dr Ambedkar Jayanti day when he was witnessing a function organized to lay foundations for construction of houses. Vinod's left thumb has been chopped off and he has suffered fracture in the left leg and on the right shoulder.

Patna, May 6, 2002 (the Hindu), Dalit labourers killed

Six Dalit migrant labourers of Jodphur district of Rajasthan were killed last night in Diliyanlak village of Bihar's Bhojpur district allegedly by the Ranbir sena, a private army of feudal landlords. The sena had demanded money from the labourers contractor. The sena wanted the contractor to leave the place.

Patna, May 8, 2002 (Deccan Herald), PWG activists kill 6 more Dalits in Bihar

In a second strike within 48 hours on Dalits in Bihar, six more were gunned down by the proscribed People's War Group in Patna district. Among the Dalits were two women and two children. The incident comes less than 48 hours after the killing of six Rajasthani Dalits labourers in the same district on Sunday. Earlier on May 1, four Dalits were killed by the notorious Badku Mia gang for refusing to serve liquor to the gang leader's father.

Machilipatnam, May 9, 2002 (Deccan Herald), 150 Dalits attacked in Andhra Pradesh

Owing to previous enmity, about 150 Dalits of Lingawaram village in Andhra Pradesh were attacked with lethal weapons and 15 houses were damaged by the villagers of neighbouring Merakgueam, this morning.

New Delhi, May 16, 2002 (The Hindu), PM regrets continuing atrocities against Dalits

The Prime Minister regretted that atrocities were still being committed against SC/ST-members of society and the situation called for a transformation of society. This change should come through awareness, proper appreciation of the concerns of the weaker sections and adoption of a practical approach to ameliorate their lot and not through violence.

Shimla, May 19, 2002 (The Hindu), Dalit youth rebuked for entering temple.

Surender Kumar, who belongs to the Koli community – a notified Scheduled Caste – was rebuked by some upper caste youths who surrounded him when he came out of the temple. They asked him to pay some fine so as not to incur the wrath of the deity and the upper castes in the area. The priest has warned Mr. Kumar of dire consequences if he tried to enter the temple again.

The 1998 Human Rights Watch report *Broken People* states: “In what has been called India’s hidden apartheid entire villages in many Indian states remain completely segregated by cast. National legislation and constitutional protections serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below the ‘pollution line’. Despite the fact that untouchability was abolished under India’s constitution in 1950 the practice of untouchability – the imposition of social disabilities on persons by reason of their birth in certain cast – remains very much a part of rural India. Untouchables may not cross the line dividing their part of the village from that occupied by higher castes. They may not use the same wells, visit the same temples, drink from the same cup in tea stalls, or lay claim to land that is legally theirs. Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay of debts to upper-cast creditors. Dalit women face the triple burden of cast, class and gender. Dalit girls have been forced to become prostitutes for upper-cast patrons and village priests. Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women are used

by landlords and the police to inflict political ‘lessons’ and crush dissent within the community.”¹¹ In spite of anti-dowry legislation the cases of harassment/cruelty to married women continue unabated. The occurrence of cases of brides being burned for not bringing enough dowry have reached scandalous heights.

It is not only these outright atrocities that make up the human rights violations on the Dalits. In all places and sections of Indian society they are discriminated and live in a lesser position than others. A few examples:

- Almost 50% of the Dalits live below the poverty line, against an all India average of around 35%. The percentage of Dalits below the poverty line has actually increased since 1987 (info. 1997-1998)
- The levels of middle, secondary and higher education of Dalits are much lower compared to other communities. The drop out rate of Dalit children at all levels of education is above 50% (info. 1997)
- More than 30% of all girl children from Dalit communities are child labourers (info. 1994)
- More than 20% of the Dalits did not have access to safe drinking water (info. 1996).¹²

Regardless of the numbers and statistics (which are easily misleading), fact is that human rights of millions of Dalits are still violated every day.



Gap between promise and practice: Why?

From the moment the constitution was founded many other laws and regulations containing human rights have followed. They promise a country of social, economical, cultural and political equality, for all people living in it. Up till this day it has been a lot of words and less actions. The gap between human rights theory and

everyday practice of violations is vast. Why is that? Some important reasons are given on the following pages.

- According to many people the degrading caste-system is the root cause why the situation of the Dalits has not improved. Caste influence continues to be all-pervasive in India and is very difficult to eradicate. Every day life in Indian civil society is still ruled by this system where one community can dominate another. “The hierarchical organization of the caste system is responsible for producing a social psychology which in the first place produces a spirit of rivalry among the different castes for dignity, and secondly it produces an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt.”¹³

The dominant caste people possess most of the power in India and they don't want to give up their supremacy. For this purpose they use the national resources and positions of authority (that are mostly under their control) to stop Dalits from gaining a better place in society. They commit an increasing amount of atrocities because of the Dalits growing urge and actions for proper development.

Caste is everywhere, not only where one caste subjugates and oppresses the other but also through the government-schemes that provide provisions and benefits to marginalized communities based on being Scheduled Caste. This leads to communities nowadays wanting to prove they are of low caste so as to be able to lay hands on the benefits.

On the other hand each caste (also the Dalit-castes) attempts to improve its own status in competition with its rivals through acquiring wealth and other attributes of higher castes. There is no unity among the different lower castes and no caste on its own is strong enough to implement social changes.

The persistence of the caste system makes a society where

human rights are respected virtually impossible. Caste and human rights are a contradiction in terminus, because the Hindu normative prescriptions provide no base for human rights. They talk about pollution, racial superiority and social privileges. For example the Laws of Manu say: “In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead to her son”. From the moment they are born most Indians are educated to believe in these normative prescriptions of the Hindu-religion and they are not taught to follow the governmental legislation (with its human rights laws).¹⁴

Changing the caste system is hard because caste is deeply rooted in every Indian through culture and religion and everybody believes in it, dominant and oppressed alike.

- Another main reason for the enormous gap between theory and practice is the unwillingness of the Indian government to implement and enforce human rights legislation. Land reform acts are not implemented, reserved jobs are not occupied and places in colleges are not filled. Often the State itself is corrupt and actively involved in human rights violations. This is mostly because the government is ‘an extended arm of Brahminical civil society’.¹⁵ The dominant castes hold the political power and they don’t want their interests being affected by actually implementing laws. They prevent land from being redistributed because they, or their families, are the landlords, and they refuse Dalits to occupy reserved jobs because that means the Dalits will steal the ‘rightful’ jobs of the dominant castes.

On a local level the (human rights) laws are not enforced, because the law means police and judges and that means dominant castes. Police protect the dominant caste people when they have committed atrocities, because mostly they are themselves of dominant castes or they are dependent on them for their jobs and promotions.¹⁶

Dalits often don't file cases against dominant caste people because they are economically dependent on them. If cases are filled the pressure put on them by the dominant castes people often makes them drop the charges. In the event Dalits do make it to court legal aid is inadequate and many judges – the same as the police – protect the dominant caste interests.

- The system of reserved seats in legislative bodies did not lead to the hoped for benefits for Dalits through political power. Joint electorate undid possible benefits of this system because the Hindu majority chooses the Dalits who will occupy the reserved seats. This means not Dalit-leaders with a Dalit-agenda but Dalits who are member of the BJP-party or Congress and who follow party-policy sit in the reserved seats.
- The Dalits are too poor to promote demands or finance movements.
- The Dalits are too divided in their struggle. There is neither national leadership nor a nationwide Dalit-movement. The efforts of the individual movements create local changes but they are not strong enough to become a decisive national political force.
- The (aspirant) Dalit middle-class who has the power and means to influence rural desegregation is not able and/or not willing to do this. Educated Dalits have lost contact with the struggles of their community-members. They have either become 'Brahminized' or they don't dare to risk their position.¹⁷
- The Dalit-cause is not a priority on the international human rights agenda. The international Dalits-lobby is not influential enough to activate the needed broad support from foreign countries.



People who fight

The increasing chasm between the governmental promises of equality and the experiences of the people has fuelled people into action. Dalits have begun to resist subjugation and discrimination. The next paragraph gives a very brief history of modern Dalit resistance.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar started the first contemporary effort against the social, religious and economic discrimination of the Dalits in the 1920's. The major beginning was made in Maharashtra with his agitation of the Dalits to get entry to a public water tank. In the 1920's and 1930's the social movements of Dalits covered Maharashtra.

The first half of the century saw the growing of movements that worked towards political mobilization and a gradual spread of education with literary activity growing out of it.

In the 1970's these movements 'exploded' as the militant movement Dalit Panthers (inspired on the Black Panthers in the USA) emerged. According to the Dalit Panthers the problems of the Dalits could not be solved through mechanisms of appeasement. The only way out is to capture political power. The Dalits Panthers declared: "We want to rule over the entire country. Our target is not individuals but a whole system rotten to the core".¹⁸ Although the Dalit Panthers became very popular in a short time they slowly faded away in the 1980's.

Since the early 1990's people have sought to mobilize Dalits through peaceful protest against human rights violations suffered by the Dalit community.

In the new millennium the government of India is still not able to close the gap between its obligation of protecting human rights of all citizens and the continuous subjugation of the Dalits. This was

clearly proven during the recent UN-World Conference Against Racism (Aug-Sep, 2001) where the Indian government did everything to prevent the international community from acting on behalf of the Dalits.

This negative stand is the reason why many individuals and organizations in India and abroad have taken the responsibility upon themselves to work towards Dalit liberation. Their slogan is: “If we have to wait for the government of India to help the Dalits we can wait forever, so we will create the necessary changes ourselves.”

To reach their goal of changing the situation of the Dalits they use different strategies. As these strategies are not developed and used by the government but by the people they are called.

‘ People’s strategies for change ’

End of part one



Part two

People's strategies for change

Commentary on part two of the document

The study on ‘people’s strategies for change’, that has led to part two of this document, is an attempt to identify how people support the Dalit struggle for human rights. The aims of the study are:

1. To identify the most important strategies that people follow in their search for Dalit-liberation.
2. To find out how each different strategy improves the Dalit-situation.
3. To discover how the strategies are used in practice. What instruments and mechanisms are used to execute the strategy?
4. To seek fitting examples to illustrate the use of the strategies.

The following strategies have been identified and will be described in the next twelve chapters:

- Activate Dalit-support in the international community
- Change the identity of the Dalits
- Use information and communication in the Dalit-struggle
- Cooperate in the Dalit-struggle
- Generate a Dalit counter-discourse
- Create awareness about the Dalit-situation
- Develop the Dalits economically
- Improve the social welfare status of the Dalits
- Organize the Dalits
- Empower the Dalits politically
- Seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights
- Train the Dalits

Every chapter in part two of this document has the same outline. Chapters start with a brief explanation of the meaning of the strategy. In most (not all) chapters this is followed by a paragraph

that describes an important issue related to the strategy. For example in the chapter 'Changing the identity of the Dalits' a commentary is given on the current identity of Dalits, and in the chapter 'Developing the Dalits economically' the land situation of Dalits is described.

The third paragraph explains how the strategy will improve the situation of the Dalits. The next paragraph shows how people execute the strategy. It describes some important instruments and mechanisms. At the end of each chapter there will be one or two concrete examples of how the strategy is actually used in real life.



Conditions and Restrictions

- 'People' in 'people's strategies for change' refers to individuals (i.e. social activists and intellectuals) and groups (i.e. NGO's, political parties) who have consciously taken up the Dalit-cause and want to move social development of the Dalits in a specific desired direction.¹⁹ It certainly refers not to the government.
- The ambition of the study is to identify the strategies that people use, not to classify them. That is why the strategies described in this document are often not easily comparable with one another. They vary in being more abstract or concrete or being more directly or indirectly capable of bringing actual change in the situation of Dalits.
- No opinions will be given on the different strategies. If one strategy is thought to be better or worse for the Dalit-cause then others it is not part of this study to express that. Everybody can form an opinion for himself/herself of course.
- The strategies are linked to one another in mutual dependency. 'Create awareness about the Dalit-situation' is a way to 'Change the identity of the Dalits' and 'Organize the Dalits' means 'Cooperate in the Dalit-struggle'. Still they are not one and the same strategy. Organizations and individuals follow and emphasize the importance of some but not all the strategies at the same time.
- Many instruments and mechanisms are not specifically attached to one strategy but can be utilized for the execution of

different strategies. Instruments such as rallies, publishing books and struggles are tools for different strategies.

- This document is about strategies, instruments and mechanisms that are being used at present. It is not about historical or future activities, nor about activities that should be undertaken.
- The instruments and mechanisms in this document don't make up an imperative list. The amount of instruments and mechanisms is near to infinite and in this document only a few important ones are highlighted in each chapter.



Activate Dalit-support in the international community

Activate Dalit-support in the international community stands for individuals and organizations trying to stimulate and motivate foreign governments and public into helping the Dalits. This chapter shows why activating the international community helps the Dalits and it describes how this is done. The chapter starts with an introduction to the attitude of the government of India towards international pressure.

The government of India and the issue of international pressure

India's attitude to international pressure is a stand of rejection. India is very resolute in keeping international interference outside supposed internal affairs. The Indian government more often than not appeals to the sovereignty-principle. It does this even when it is clear that India can be held responsible - in accordance with international human rights legislation - for violations of human rights that have occurred on its territory. A good example of the Indian stand comes from the recent atrocities that took place in Gujarat (Feb-Apr, 2002), where thousands of Muslims were slaughtered. The Indian government used harsh words several times to demonstrate that the country does not tolerate international interference in what happened in Gujarat. Prime-Minister Vajpayee called the concern expressed by foreign countries "intrusion of India's domestic home turf".²⁰ Another example comes from the 2001 UN-World Conference Against Racism where the government of India stated that the issue raised by the Dalits, that 'casteism is racism', is an internal issue. But human rights issues are not internal affairs. Human rights issues are reviewed and debated every year in United Nations conferences. Countries that transgress the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other

legislation are about the human rights situation in their country. In sharp contradiction to the stand of rejection, the government of India itself has never missed an opportunity to haul up other nations in international fora for human rights violations. It may be recalled that in 1946 India became the first country in the world to raise at the United Nations the issue of apartheid.²¹ This becomes even more astonishing when in 2002 the ongoing practices of untouchability are being described as hidden apartheid (but not by India).

Why activating the international community helps the Dalits

Activating the international community leads to multi-sided pressure being mounted on the Indian government. Especially in these modern times, where India has become an integral part of the globalizing world, international pressure is an important strategy. Despite a policy of non-interference in internal affairs the growing economic and political dependency make it more and more difficult for India to ignore global influence. Large institutional investment funds for example increasingly base their investment decisions on criteria of global social responsibility.²²

Activating the international community creates a bigger chance of India being formally reprimanded on the violation of international human rights treaties. And with new techniques such as the 'International Criminal Court' the influence and the hold that other countries have on India will only grow.

Getting people from abroad involved in the Dalit-struggle is a method for the Dalits to acquire more means and create new opportunities. Of course the financial means of the donor-agencies but also the knowledge and experience that can be helpful in project-development. International institutes can offer support in building the capacity of Dalit-leadership.²³

Visits of foreigners to India and foreign concern in the human rights situation helps to show the oppressors that atrocities can no longer be committed unnoticed. This is important because people are sensitive for the reality that what they do is suddenly no longer obscured, but visible for the entire world to see. People will think twice before they commit a crime again. People are especially afraid of being visible to foreign countries because they cannot control possible reactions.

Cooperation and coordination between international organizations leads to collective (and therefore often stronger) mobilization of support for the Dalits. It also leads to a faster exchange of information and the network of organizations can be a model for the Dalit-communities in India.²⁴ Being part of a network works stimulating for the participants because of the reassurance they get from not being alone in the Dalit- struggle.

How people activate Dalit-support in the international community

More and more are the Dalits getting support from abroad for their struggle. This paragraph describes a few noteworthy ways people use to activate support from the international community.

- Dalits are more and more present during important international meetings on social issues and human rights. They are not only present but they make themselves heard and they are involved in the decision-making process. The World Social Forum and the UN-World Conference Against Racism are good recent examples (see the example about UN-WCAR below).
- Exchange of knowledge and experience between Dalits and foreigners creates international support. Dalits give lectures at foreign universities and they hold talks with human

rights organizations and governments that might be willing to help them. Foreigners (i.e. human rights activists, social workers, students) come to India to experience and learn about the Dalit-situation. They gain the necessary knowledge to help the Dalits in the future.

- To influence foreign public opinion contact is sought with international media. These media are convinced to publish articles about the Dalits in foreign magazines and newspapers.
- Other media that are used to reach abroad are the international release of books and the use of websites.
- The base of Dalit-support is broadened through formal and informal international networks of individuals and organizations. Foreign human rights organizations, politicians, journalists, professors are all part of these Dalit-support-networks.

Dalits make themselves heard at the UN-WCAR

‘Down down casteism, up, up humanism’ was the main slogan of the Dalit representatives at the U.N World Conference against Racism in Durban (UN-WCAR), that was held from August 27 to September 7, 2001.²⁵ This conference is a good example of the Dalits activating international support.

The main goal at the conference was to get the ‘Government Conference’ to admit that caste-based discrimination is racism. The Dalit representation was led by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Federation of Dalit Women. These networks of Dalit organizations impressed many people with the professional way they prepared for the conference and with the way they made themselves heard in Durban.

The Indian government went to every extent to prevent the Dalits from reaching their goal by stating that caste-based discrimination is not racial discrimination and that it is an internal issue. The Indian government spent millions of rupees on 'Government Organized NGO's' that supported the stand of the Indian government at the conference.²⁶

In the end there were victories and defeats for the Dalits in the race to Durban and in Durban itself.

A victory in the race to Durban was the UN-subcommission of Human Rights taking up paragraph no.109 in the agenda of the conference. This paragraph states that no discrimination should be shown on the basis of decent and occupation.²⁷

Another victory was the NGO Forums 'Declaration and Action Plan' that stated that caste discrimination is one of the most horrendous forms of discrimination. It stated that: "caste discrimination and untouchability practiced against generations of Dalits for centuries together amounts to systematic generational and cultural Daliticide, which is the mass-scale destruction of their individual and collective identity, dignity and self-respect."²⁸

The biggest defeat came when the 'Government Conference' refused to accept that casteism is racism. But in spite of this defeat the Dalit-effort in Durban is seen as a big step forward in internationalizing the problem because the Dalit-representatives successfully brought up the debate of Dalit-emancipation at the international level.²⁹



Change the identity of the Dalits

Identity is concerned with the question: 'Who am I?' For the Dalits it is not an individual identity but a group-identity that matters. Group-identity is concerned with the self-esteem and self-image of a community, real or imaginary, dealing with the existence and role: 'Who are we?' 'What position do we have in a society vis-à-vis other communities?' 'How are we related to others?' ³⁰

Changing the group-identity of the Dalits has three dimensions: religio-cultural, economic and political.³¹ Most efforts of people who want to change the identity of the Dalits are focused on one of these three dimensions. This chapter gives the reasons why changing the identity of the Dalits will help them and it illustrates the different approaches people use to change the identity of the Dalits.

The current identity of the Dalit-people

"People and their identities are the product of the milieu in which they chance to be born." ³² The present identity of the Dalits has two layers, the conscious identity and the unconscious one. The conscious identity comes from thousands of years of Brahminical discourse battering in on the Dalits (see: Generate a Dalit counter-discourse). This has led the Dalits to internalize an identity of fatalism and a belief in the pollution theories and practices. They willingly stay separated from the 'pure' people because they think they might 'contaminate' them. They continue to sit outside the panchayat office during meetings and they stay physically segregated from the center of the village.

Dalits have an inferiority-complex and are self-denigrating. The identity of a large majority of the Dalits is a stigmatized one of a landless labourer, menial worker and of one belonging to a caste lowest in the caste hierarchy. But next to this conscious identity

the Dalits also have a – for a big part still unconscious - potential to resist this fatalistic identity. This ‘unconscious’ identity has yet to surface more to the conscious level. It is an identity that makes Dalits courageous enough to resist the Brahminical discourse. It makes them feel proud of being a Dalit and makes them look at themselves as equal to others.

Why changing the identity of the Dalits will help them

With their current identity Dalits will never be able to free themselves from oppression. For Dalits to claim their rightful place in Indian society it is important that they believe that their current identity is wrong and that they can change it. But Dalits will only change their current identity if there is an alternative one available, because people will only change on grounds they can identify themselves with.³³ This means that the willingness to change will only occur if they have (new) meaning systems and a symbolic base with norms and values to hold on to.³⁴ In short, if a new alternative identity is available.

When Dalits accept a new identity they are no longer a natural part of the system of oppression. They will start to realize that they have a unique identity and they will no longer accept an externally ascribed identity. They will realize that they are equal to other people.

The formation of a Dalit-identity gives them a feeling of solidarity with the other Dalits. It unifies them as the oppressed, cutting across religious, linguistic and other boundaries. For example, many groups have started to use the term Dalit as a suffix, i.e., one is a Hindu-Dalit, Muslim-Dalit or Christian-Dalit as well as a Chamar-Dalit, Mahar-Dalit or Vakar-Dalit, Maharashtrian-Dalit or Karnataka-Dalit.³⁵ Some Dalits have even officially changed their first name

into Dalit. Visibly showing the new identity and being proud of it is a way of contesting the hegemony of dominant caste and a form of protest.³⁶ With a new identity Dalits become less dependent and vulnerable and they have more self-respect.

How people change the identity of the Dalits

“From untouchables to don’t touchables” is a statement from the book *Dalitology*.³⁷ Many individuals and organizations realize it is important to change the identity of the Dalits. They use different approaches.

The first approach of identity formation, which many people see as the best one, is strengthening the old and original identity of the Dalits. This identity formation is based on emphasizing the sharing of a common culture on the one hand and harping on the separateness from others on the other hand.³⁸ The original identity is based on old traditions, rituals and values. The traditions that already existed when the Aryans invaded India and started oppressing the indigenous people. These traditions are still present in the Dalit-communities, sometimes visibly and sometimes below the surface. It is a positive identity that makes them feel proud of being a Dalit and it makes them lay down their inferiority complex. It is an identity where Hinduism and casteism have no place. With this new identity Dalits will start living again according to the traditional values of equality and fraternity. In many of these ‘revitalized’ identities the traditional aspect of a strong relationship with the earth is found. These traditional identities are ‘constructed’ by Dalit-intellectuals (i.e. writers, poets, philosophers, etc). To spread these new identities, leaders of Dalit-organizations go to the villages and accompany the villagers in the process of change. Cultural activities such as traditional festivals, music and theater and (re)introduction of rituals and symbols acquaint the villagers with the new identity.

The second approach to changing the identity of the Dalits is through conversion to an existing religion such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Sikhism. Those are all religions that have equality as their profession of faith in contrast to the dominant Hindu-religion. Ambedkar is the most famous of the Dalit-converters, stating that though he was born a Hindu he would not die a Hindu. To announce a new identity to his people he converted to Buddhism in 1956, with millions of others following their leader.^{39 40} After conversion Dalits start to identify themselves as Christian-Dalits or Buddhist-Dalits. A remark has to be made here that conversion didn't bring to Dalits what they hoped to find. Caste, dominance and discrimination of Dalits also rule the religions they converted to.

Thirdly, people try to change the identity of the Dalits by emphasizing the fact that Dalits are citizens and human beings. They don't emphasize the difference between Dalits and others, quite the contrary, they focus on the fact that Dalits as human beings are not different from others and that they have equal rights. They point out that relations of inequality and dominance are primarily governed by economic and political power and not merely or significantly by the cultural and religious forces. If the economic and political situation of the Dalits is improved the influence of the relationship of superiority and inferiority will become less and less, because the Dalits will no longer be dependent on the people that dominate them.⁴¹

Besides these three approaches there are also intellectuals who state that changing the identity does not have one best approach, because Dalits differ too much from one another. They merrily stress the necessity of the Dalits getting rid of their Hindu/Caste identity. They do not claim, in contrast to the other approaches, to offer a new and better identity. They say this is not possible because the search for a new identity will lead to a different result for every individual or community. Mr. V.T. Rajshekar (editor Dalit Voice) explains this view. "Don't try to give Dalits one identity,

the country is too big for that. In Punjab the Dalits are very different from the Karnataka-Dalits. Each jati should strengthen its own identity in the way it thinks is the best.” “Choose any identity you seem fit,” mister Rajshekar says, “as long as you quit Hinduism. If the house is on fire should everybody be obliged to use only one single window to get out? No, take any window. Jump from the window, use a rope or use the stairs.”⁴²

Dr. Ambedkar and his role in changing the Dalit-identity

Dr. Ambedkar is a very good example of a ‘tool’ in changing the identity of the Dalits. “All Dalits, irrespective of creed, caste and political affiliation consider Ambedkar as their leader,” writes Ghanshyam Shah in his book *Dalit identity and politics*.⁴³

This may be a bold statement for some to accept but nobody can deny that more than 45 years after his death Ambedkar still wields a tremendous influence in the search for identity among the Dalit masses.

During his life Ambedkar helped Dalits in raising their consciousness. He was instrumental in making them aware of the indignities and dehumanization arising out of untouchability. He changed their Dalit-identity by instilling in them a sense of pride and self-dignity.⁴⁴

After his death organizations and individuals started using Ambedkar’s life, struggles, visions, writings and actions for the same purpose of raising consciousness and changing identity. They are guided by him and derive inspiration from his struggles and his message to get educated, organized and then to agitate.⁴⁵

First they use Ambedkar’s life by portraying Ambedkar in a symbolic context as a model to follow. Ambedkar is THE

model for the Dalits of a person having the 'right' Dalit-identity. So by following the example of a person with the 'right' identity the Dalits will start changing their own mistaken identity. Ambedkar is portrayed as a contemporary historical figure who is a Dalit himself and who managed to defeat and push back the dominating forces on the highest level in many occasions. Ambedkar is the man that gave the Dalits their rights by being the 'father of the constitution'.

Schools and libraries are named after Ambedkar, Ambedkar statues are installed all over the country, his birthday is celebrated in Ambedkar Jayanthi-festivals, 'Jai Bhim' is the greet of the Ambedkarites, the new millennium is declared Ambedkar Uga, etc, etc.

Second, besides Ambedkar being a symbolic example for the Dalits, his speeches, teachings and writings are still used by many activists, intellectuals and politicians. Activists use the words of Ambedkar to articulate the goals and visions of Dalit-organizations. For intellectuals he is the driving spirit and for politicians the words of Ambedkar deliver the contents of their party-program.

Looking a bit further at the influence of Ambedkar on intellectuals, he has remained a driving sprit behind the literary works of many Dalit-writers. They owe their critical imagination on struggles for identity assertion to the teachings of Ambedkar and his zest for Dalit-liberation. He has sharpened their sensitivities, made them outward looking, articulate and assertive in their expression. ⁴⁶

Poem on a new Dalit-identity

J.V. Pawar's poem *I have Become the Tide* about the need to struggle for a new identity.⁴⁷

*The wind that blows every day
That day yelled in my ear
'women stripped'
'boycott in the village'
'man killed'
As it spoke it told me a mantra: 'Make another Mahad.'
My hands now move
Towards the weapon on the wall.
I am now the sea: I soar, I surge
I move out to build your tombs.
The winds, storms, sky, earth
Now all are mine.
In every inch of the rising struggle
I stand erect*



Use information and communication in the Dalit-struggle

Information and communication in the Dalit-struggle is about Dalits having access to the right information and about collecting information that can be used to communicate the Dalit-message. This chapter describes why information and communication are vital for Dalits and it shows how information is collected and communicated.

Culture of secrecy

The right to know is the cornerstone of any democratic process. Without access to information phrases such as “people’s participation”, “accountability”, “transparency” and “empowerment” become empty and meaningless.⁴⁸

For Dalits gaining access to (the right) public information is often the same as walking into a brick wall. If Dalits want to apply for government schemes they are deliberately hindered by the untransparent bureaucratic system. Dominant caste officials misuse the ignorance, naivety and illiteracy of many Dalits to supply them with either insufficient or wrong information.

When Dalits file cases it is more rule than exception that information is changed or hidden. This happens at all levels, from local police to high court judges. Medical reports are concealed, witnesses are not found and false charges are fabricated.

Why information and communication are vital for the Dalits

Possessing accurate information is of vital importance to Dalits because if Dalits want to govern their own lives they need the

information to do so. Access to the right information provides a peaceful legal procedure and it curbs corruption. For the Dalits this means information about available governmental schemes and openness of information in law suits. Equal availability of information to all people also strengthens democracy and gives the exploited a voice.⁴⁹

Possessing accurate statistical and qualitative information about the Dalit-situation is important to substantiate or waylay claims made by others. For instance to substantiate the fact that constitutional provisions in favor of Dalits are violated.⁵⁰ Also the message and the demands that Dalits want to communicate will get much stronger they are based on accurate information.

“Communication is a living expression as well as an aspiration of human struggle for a fuller life.”⁵¹ By communicating the right information Dalits create visibility. Being visible with a strong message means that others will be impressed by and convinced of the Dalit message. When a procession of hundreds of Dalits walks through the dominant caste part of the village, singing songs of liberations, the dominant caste people will be impressed and will be convinced that they are no longer able to ignore the Dalits. They might think twice before committing crimes on Dalits again.

Communication also plays an important role in strengthening relationships, building awareness, influencing public opinion and mobilizing people.⁵² For example, Dalit organizations make plans and annual reports to comfort and convince (possible) donors, newspaper articles are published to influence public opinion and festivals are organized to awaken the Dalits in the villages.

How information is collected and communicated

The information that is used to communicate the Dalit-message is collected in different ways and by different people.

To collect information journalists, social activists, lawyers, professors and others 'investigate' practical or scientific aspects of the Dalit-situation. They do this on their own or on behalf of institutes and organizations. They collect information during fieldtrips, by reading literature and by putting pressure on bureaucrats to hand over the requested (and often held back) information.

Attending meetings such as seminars, public hearings and workshops is also a useful way to collect data. Information is collected about the life of Dalits in the villages, the work of people's movements, atrocities that have been committed on Dalits, available government schemes, acts of resistance, etc.

The collected information is of not much use if it is not communicated properly. Communication of the Dalit-message is done in many different ways. A few examples are given below.

- Organizations found Dalit resource and information-centers, which contain libraries and residential training facilities. They make information available through Internet, books, magazines and personal contact.
- Researchers publish reports with statistical data on the Dalit-situation and they publish books that contain the stories of the lives and struggles of Dalits.
- Journalists write articles in newspapers about atrocities and successful acts of resistance. Social activists publish newsletters and magazines and stick posters on the walls.
- Many organizations use interpersonal communication, such as counseling, problem sharing and discussions.
- Dalit-organizations publish their visions and descriptions of their activities in plans and annual reports.
- The Dalit-demands are communicated to politicians and the public with the help of memorandums and manifestos. Public and politics will also learn about the Dalit-message through rallies, processions and manifestations.

- To express the Dalit-message in the villages Dalits sing songs about oppression and liberation and they conduct street theater.

National Public Hearing on Dalit Human Rights Violations

A good example of collecting and communicating information is the 'National Public Hearing on Dalit Human Rights Violations', that was held in Chennai on 18 & 19 April, 2000. This event was organized by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (see: Cooperate in the Dalit struggle). Before a jury of eminent personalities, such as former judges from High Court and advocates of the Supreme Court, a large number of Dalit victims deposed on their rights violations in different areas of life.

Some of them had lost their dear children who had been murdered or burnt alive. Others had been violently disposed of their land, houses and livelihood. Dalit women were ill-treated by dominant caste people and State authorities. In many cases the State (i.e. police, bureaucrats or judges) tried to sabotage the judicial process or they were themselves rights-violators.

Important goals of the public hearing were:

- To provide space for the Dalits to depose their cases for the Peoples Court.
- To give an opportunity to the national and international community to express their solidarity with the victims.
- To bring to the minds of those obligated with the responsibility of maintaining law and order and dispensing justice in the democratic polity that it is their bounden duty and moral imperative to give easy access to rights victims in the State institutions.
- To impress forcefully on the minds of the dominant caste groups that the feudal character and the practice of untouchability is an anachronism in these changing times.

The Dalit testimonies along with corroborating evidence presented to the Jury exposed the colossal and intentional failure of the proclaimed progressive policies of the State. “No more do Dalits have faith in the law enforcing agencies or the grand illusory promise of the State,” was a repeated outcry during the hearing.

To draw as much attention as possible to the outcome of the hearing the testimonies were published. The document reveals a people broken, battered and humiliated, and yet firm as an immovable mountain in their mission to fight for justice and humanity!⁵³

The *Dalit Voice*

Dalit Voice is a journal that is “The Voice of the Persecuted Nationalities Denied Human Rights”.⁵⁴ The *Dalit Voice* was established in 1981 and is the most widespread journal that expresses the problems of the Dalits and works towards Dalit-liberation. People all over India and in foreign countries are subscribed to it. The journal is published by the energetic editor, Mr. V.T. Rajshekar.

The main goal of the *Dalit Voice* is to strengthen the identity of the Dalits. The broad view on *Dalit Voice* of V.T. Rajshekar himself: “Dalits are all the same inhabitant family that are crushed by Brahmins, so we have to get a new identity and fight. The *Dalit Voice* tries to help the Dalits in their fight.”⁵⁵ In the *Dalit Voice* Ambedkar’s views are promoted unceasingly.

Dalit Voice never holds back its tongue and with the crusade against Brahminism – with articles that have titles such as ‘Brahminism as father of terrorism’ and ‘Hindu Nazis as followers of Hitler’ – the journal raises praise from Dalit-supporters but also creates a lot of criticism and forthright enmity.



Cooperate in the Dalit-struggle

Cooperating has many synonyms in the dictionary: work together, collaborate, combine forces and work as a team. These synonyms give a good idea of what cooperating in the Dalit-struggle is about. It means bringing and coming together of people to make a joint effort in creating change in a continuing situation of oppression of the Dalits. Dalits cooperate among themselves but they also cooperate with others that can be helpful in the struggle. This chapter describes why and how people cooperate in the Dalit-struggle.

The influence of (not) standing united

“While every peasant has someone’s boot on his neck, many have the concurrent satisfaction of stepping on someone’s else’s face. Inequality, the bane of the hierarchical society is also its chief delight”⁵⁶

If Dalits are (or can be) united in their struggle, and if being united influences the power and the outcome of the struggle, is a subject of great discussion among intellectuals. Many intellectuals think that Dalits differ too much among themselves to be able to stand united and they claim that this dividedness is an important reason why human rights have not been achieved for the Dalits. Others say that even without a united front ‘a victory’ for the Dalit cause can be achieved.

Dalits are spread-out all over India and differ from each other in language, occupation, religion, region and caste. For instance, Dalits are divided into more than 400 jatis. Many Dalit-jatis think themselves either superior or inferior to other Dalit-jatis. And the amount of oppression and untouchability Dalits have to suffer from in the present and had to suffer from in the past also differs from one region to another.

Inspite of these differences between Dalits, many Dalit-intellectuals and activists do see a strong binding factor in the fact that a specified group of people is or was subject to practices of untouchability and they define Dalits accordingly. Oliver Mendelsohn says: “There is a fault line in Indian society that divides untouchables from other elements. A fault line based in the ideologies of pollution and impurity.”⁵⁷

Practices of untouchability in present and past might be a way to separate the Dalit community from other communities but it is uncertain if this is enough to unify them in a combined struggle towards liberation. At the moment it is not enough because the Dalit-movement does not operate in a joint front. There has not been a single, unified Dalit movement in the country, now or in the past. Different movements have highlighted issues related to Dalits around different ideologies.⁵⁸ In many regions there are local and regional initiatives but there is no nationwide Dalit-movement that cooperates in the struggle to end oppression. There are Ambedkarites, Buddhist-Dalit and Christian-Dalit organizations. They all have their own ideologies from which they develop plans and programs.

The division among the Dalits makes it easy for the government to find loopholes and escape the responsibility to help the Dalits. Some say the only way to get real nationwide changes is a nationwide covering strategy from a charismatic Dalit-leader.⁵⁹ But others say that unity among the Dalits is not necessary to make changes in India. What is needed is that as many people as possible stand up and fight the oppression. As long as their goal is a common one they don't have to unite and fight in the same way.

Why people cooperate in the Dalit-struggle

‘Together we stand strong’ may be an old saying but it holds a lot of truth. Dalits create better opportunities to solve issues when they work together, like in local groups such as people's movements

and village sangha's. When Dalits cooperate they are much more impressing and convincing than when they act individually. Cooperation creates a better position for negotiations with the government and dominant castes. This makes it easier to file cases, refrain dominant castes from committing atrocities and straighten injustice. If Dalits cooperate among themselves it also gives them a sense of pride and self-esteem.

Organizing activities in a joint fashion will create more effective actions. If Dalits work together it is no longer easy for the government or others that are guilty of the present Dalit situation to find loopholes and escape their responsibility of helping the Dalits.

Another benefit of Dalit organizations working together is the possibility it creates for them to learn from each other. Learning from each other will produce opportunities to create better organizations.

Not only cooperating among themselves is beneficial for Dalits, also cooperating with the government and others is useful. By working together with the government and others (such as lawyers) Dalits create support from different helpful sources. It for instance helps to facilitate the effective implementation of public undertakings.

How people cooperate in the Dalit-struggle

“United we win, divided we fall”. Dalits may be divided in their resistance-struggle, but still many initiatives of cooperation take place between Dalits and others. Some of the main initiatives are the following.

- Sangha's and people's movements are examples of Dalits cooperating in the villages (for an explanation of sangha's and people's movements see the chapter 'Organize the Dalits').

When atrocities occur in a village the Dalit-leaders and the sangha-members will gather the people from this and the surrounding villages. Together these Dalits will go to the police to file a case. They will stand united in front of police and dominant caste people and they will make a joint effort to straighten the injustice. They organize massive hunger strikes and rallies to put pressure on others. (See: Seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights)

- Formal or informal cooperation between Dalit-organizations and the government also takes place. They converge in ad hoc meetings and workgroups, where Dalits talk to bureaucrats, ministers and members of parliament. Dalit-organizations also give workshops to government officials about the problems of Dalits and how to solve them.
- Cooperation between Dalits and individuals such as journalists, writers, professors and lawyers gives Dalits access to much needed services.
- Dalit-organizations cooperate more and more with one another. They organize joint activities such as national campaigns and discussion platforms.

National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) is an excellent example of how Dalits achieve more on a higher level by working together.

On 10-11 October, 1998 a large gathering of Dalit-activists from the four Southern Indian States, a few from the northern state and some Dalit-academicians took a collective decision to launch and lead a National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights. The campaign was called for because on the 50th anniversary of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and after 50 years of independence still every hour 2 Dalits were assaulted, every day three Dalit women were raped, every day 2 Dalits were murdered and every day 2 Dalit houses were burnt down.

The NCDHR solicits support and solidarity from other movements, organizations and institutions and from sympathetic and sensitive intellectuals and citizens of India and the world at large. It does not want to replace efforts made by others but seeks collaboration of all to carry the initiative forward.⁶⁰

The '99 campaign included a Campaign Manifesto Document, posters, a signature campaign (which gathered 2.5 million signatures) and the presentation of a memorandum with demands to the President, the Prime Minister e.o.⁶¹ At the closing of the campaign a Black Paper was published and distributed containing the Dalit human rights and a critique on the government. The Black Paper demanded a White Paper of the government detailing the performance of the government in upholding Dalit-rights.⁶²

After this successful campaign the NCDHR stayed together as a platform of cooperation and it went into the second phase. The second phase was the preparation for the Dalit demands at the World Conference against Racism (see: Activate Dalit-support in

the international community). Another important historic event during the second phase was the National Public Hearing on atrocities on Dalits in India that took place on April 18-19, 2000 in Chennai. Now the NCDHR has entered the third phase with new programs and activities. An example is the national study center on Dalits.

One of the greatest achievements of the NCDHR that it brings many Dalit-groups and organizations together in a joint front. This way the Dalit-movement becomes much more powerful.

The (International) Dalit Solidarity Network

The (International) Dalit Solidarity Network is a good example of cooperating on the international level.

On his two-month sabbatical visit to India in 1997 Rev. David Haslam heard about Dr. Ambedkar and the caste-system. Learning about the Dalit-situation ultimately led him to the formation of the Dalit Solidarity Network (DSN) in the U.K. The DSN, UK is composed of human rights motivated individuals, groups and leading NGO's like Amnesty International and Minority Rights Group. The main dimensions of the work of the DSN are raising consciousness in the UK, working with human rights agencies to focus their activities and communicating with politicians. The DSN seeks to get publicity for the Dalit-struggle by informing the media and bringing out a newsletter.

Similar DSN-kind-of-efforts are found in other countries such as USA (Dalit Solidarity Forum), Canada, Netherlands, Germany and France.

In the beginning of 2000 representatives from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and solidarity organizations agreed to develop an international network of Dalit-support. This network was called International Dalit Solidarity Network (ISDN) and is now growing into a vigorous international movement for Dalit human rights and against casteism. The ISDN consists of a network of human rights bodies, aid agencies and the NCDHR with an open invitation for other organizations to join. The ISDN worked tirelessly to include caste in the agenda of the UN-World Conference Against Racism (see: Activate Dalit-support in the international community).⁶³



Generate a Dalit counter-discourse

Generating a Dalit counter-discourse means that intellectuals create an alternative discourse to the Brahminical discourse of dominancy and oppression. Discourse means the marking of a field of thought/language/behavior that can be distinguished for a certain group. Discourses provide normative prescriptions, which transform a group into a social group with a culture. Normative prescriptions work through control and exclusion ('you must do this' you must not do that') and are therefore a practice of power.⁶⁴ Discourses are often used for repression but might as well be a practice of justice.⁶⁵ This chapter describes why intellectuals create a Dalit counter-discourse and it shows how they do that. The chapter starts with a description of the Brahminical discourse that is countered by the Dalits.

Forces of Brahminism

“Hinduism is such a primitive and powerful discourse that it has made the slaves enjoy their slavery.”⁶⁶ Although this is a very bold statement it definitely holds some truth. For more than 3000 years Brahmin-intellectuals, who call themselves the ritually purest and highest caste group, have used Brahminical discourses to seduce, convert, oppress and attack Dalits. Their ideologies – which have been written down in important Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas and the Manusmriti – are capable of playing many different roles.

Some lines from these scriptures:

- The Shudra (person of lower caste) must not acquire knowledge and it is a crime to give him education.
- The duty and salvation of the Shudra lies in his serving the higher classes.
- If he places himself on the same seat with his superior he shall be banished with a mark on his buttock.

- If he listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the Veda his ears will be filled with molten tin or lac.⁶⁷

Kancha Ilaiah says in his famous book *Why I am not a Hindu*: “Hinduism has a socio-economic and cultural design that manipulates the consciousness of the Dalits systematically. It has created institutions to sustain hegemony of the Brahminical forces.”⁶⁸ The Dalits are a product of the Brahminical discourse, which creates a reality of economic and social deprivation.

The original Dalit-ideologies are suppressed by the Brahminical discourses. Through a continuous barrage of ascription of characteristics of impurity to the Dalits the Dalits have internalized the ascriptions and the innate Dalit-character has been submerged.⁶⁹ Instead came an identity of resignation and fatalism (see: Change the identity of the Dalits).

Why intellectuals generate a Dalit counter-discourse

A Dalit counter-discourse generated by intellectuals is essential because such a discourse is capable of resisting and pushing back the ideological forces of Brahminism. Intellectuals have the knowledge and experience that is needed to create a counterforce of sufficient power. They have the (new) words to say things accurately and convincingly and they know how to communicate the message.⁷⁰

The intellectuals inspire the Dalit-masses with their counterforce and they make alternatives visible. They rewrite history and they expose the dominant Brahminical ideology.

Dalits need a discourse to hold on to and to give meaning to their existence. To ‘save’ the Dalits from the oppression that derives from the Brahminical discourse they need an alternative discourse they can follow. If Dalits start following this alternative discourse their current fatalistic identity will change.

The Dalit-intellectuals resolve the contradictions that emerge within the Dalit-community. They have the capacity to keep the Dalits unified when polarization grows within the community.⁷¹

How intellectuals generate a Dalit counter-discourse

Intellectuals generate a counter-discourse opposite to the forces of Brahminism. This paragraph describes several manners that intellectuals use to create the Dalit counter-discourse.

- Organized in collectives and as individuals intellectuals develop new discourses and Dalit-theories. Philosophers, activists and clergyman act as ‘modern missionaries’ and offer counter-discourses with new identities, systems of meaning and Dalit-theories.
- During meetings such as seminars and conferences intellectuals have the opportunity to ‘test’ new ideas, improve them and communicate them. They also communicate their ideas by publishing books, magazines, pamphlets and manifestos. These documents describe the Dalit-situation, teach a language of resistance and show lists of demands. These lists of demands insist from people who are in a position to change the human rights situation of the Dalits that they take up action.
- Professors and journalists offer counter-theories through scientific and practical research into the Dalit-situation. For instance, with the help of social sciences as sociology and social anthropology Dalit-academics ‘attack’ the Brahminical scientific approach of caste.⁷²
- Writers and poets know how to visualize the dehumanizing situation of the Dalits in a powerful and illustrative way. They spread texts about the new Dalit-identity and they attack Brahminism. They also restore important historical events and Dalit-characters such as the native king Ravana.

- Singers compose songs about the historical Dalit-culture and they sing 'liberation songs' that call for resistance.

Dalitology, history of the Dalit people

The book 'Dalitology' that is written by Mr. M.C. Raj is a good example of a Dalit counter-discourse.

Dalitology, the Book of the Dalit-people is an attempt at establishing and consolidating an age-old history, culture and tradition, proposing it to be a global (non universal) alternative to dominance. Dalitology does not believe in any form of dominance and resists all shenanigans of subjugation wherever it takes place in the world. It is a way of life in communication. It is a project of Dalitization, which is the other name for systemic and structural equality. Dalitology asserts that Dalits are neither Buddhists, nor Christians, nor Muslims nor Hindus. DALITS ARE DALITS. There

fore, it gives a clarion call to all the Dalits of the world to come back to Dalitism. What is it that people have to come back to? It is the Dalit-religion that all Dalits have to come back to. The Dalit-religion has no god, no heaven, no soul, and no hell. The life of the Dalit-communities revolve around the earth and we derive our energy and life from the Earth. We shall be guided by the normative order of our ancestors. A Dalit-religion is a viable alternative to achieve Dalit-liberation.

Dalitology is an attempt at rebuilding the Dalit-communities through their own history and culture. It aims at consolidating the strengths of the Dalit-communities by formally evolving normative standards, normative order and normative prescriptions based on their history and culture. This will lay the foundations for sustainability of whatever is done at the political and economic fields. Dalitology lays down the principles of internal governance based on the

worldview and value systems of the Dalit-communities derived from the guidelines of the ancestors. Dalitology is purported to be the Dalit-scriptures.

Dalitology is not the end of an aspiration. It is the beginning of the achievement of an age-old aspiration. The community norms given in Dalitology do not reflect the totality of the internal governance of the Dalit-communities. It has just laid the foundations. New codification of community norms will have to keep emerging at regular intervals in the history of the Dalit-people. Such an emergence must take place at least for another 200 years to bring about a substantial consolidation of the internal strengths of the Dalit-people.

Dalitology contains ten Books symbolically representing the ten indigenous Groups that were in existence in India when the Aryans arrived. The ten heads of Ravana are symbolic representations of these ten groups whose subjugation is also symbolized by the killing of the indigenous king Ravana.⁷³

Dalit Intellectuals Collective

In 1997 Vikas Adhyayan Kendra (VAK) brought a group of scholars and interrogator-scholars with different social locations together. These scholars came together and established the Dalit Intellectuals Collective (DIC). The DIC has a mission to defend, discuss, justify and criticize publicly certain concepts and categories, including the Dalit ones. Not only wants the DIC to give a critique on the dominant theoretical framework but the DIC also wants to examine the Dalit intellectual tradition and culture that creates and sustains internal hierarchies. The DIC attempts to find out the possibility whether any Dalit theory is possible. The DIC wants to give a Dalit-theory to Dalit-Bahujan political leaders who are now sometimes caricatured by their usually upper caste adversaries because they are without proper thinking or theory.

The collective has an inclusive character, which means it represents scholars who belong to different social destinations. The DIC organizes meetings where scholars hold discussions and the DIC publishes booklets that show the results of these meetings.⁷⁴

Note: VAK is a secular voluntary organization engaged in the study of contemporary social issues.



Create awareness about the Dalit-situation

Awareness means that you are conscious of the situation that you yourself or others are in. Creating awareness about the Dalit-situation means that Dalits and others gain knowledge of the socio-economic structures and cultural reality, which keeps Dalits subjugated.⁷⁵ It means consciousness of the fact that Hinduism and the caste-system are a cause for inequality. It also implies internalization of the concept of equality and knowing that there are alternatives. This chapter explains why creating awareness about the Dalit-situation is important and it describes how awareness is created.

The current awareness-level

Although the awareness-level of the Dalits is steadily rising, at this moment they don't have enough awareness of their own situation. They are very much part of the situation and they have not been in the position to take a step back and look from a distance at their own lives. They are not enough aware of the fact that they are actually equal to other people and that they have the same rights as others. They have only limited knowledge of the intricate ways in which the Brahminical system of degrading inequality has misled them for so long. They need to become more aware of the possibility that they can improve their lives.

Non-Dalits in India for some part (the dominant section of society) are very much aware of the situation of the Dalits and they want to preserve it. Others are much more ignorant and – just as the Dalits themselves - don't have the knowledge of the ancient wrongs. On an international level the amount of awareness was practically nil but is now slowly rising. Foreign governments, the United Nations and international NGO's slowly open their eyes for the situation of the large group of Dalits that is still being oppressed in India.

Why creating awareness about the Dalit-situation is important

Creating awareness among Dalits about their situation is essential, because only then will they stop looking at their lives as something that cannot be changed. Having knowledge of their situation is the first necessary step to get them to do something about it. If Dalits are not conscious of the problematic situation and of the possible solutions they won't feel any need to change it. Without awareness Dalits will stay puppets on the strings of the dominant castes and they will not be able to stand on their own legs. When Dalits are aware of the powers that dominate them they can start resisting them. The awareness will then give them the use of a sharper articulation of their demands.⁷⁶

The need for awareness also applies to non-Dalits in India and abroad. Before any positive action will be taken by them the level of awareness of the Dalit-situation has to grow. The dominant sections in India need awareness of the ancient wrongs to be able to accept the need for their part in redressal and removal.

How awareness is created

Creating awareness about the Dalit-situation takes place among Dalits and non-Dalits. On a local level as well as on a national and international level awareness is created in various ways.

- Theater, music and festivals are important methods in creating awareness among the Dalits in the villages. Cultural groups travel to the villages and use songs and plays to give a voice and a face to Dalit-issues. Dalits will then be able to take a step back and they will hear and see recognizable situations of their lives. Spreading newsletters is another much used method to transfer knowledge to the Dalits in the villages
- In many places Ambedkar-Jayanthi festivals are held to

celebrate the birthday of Ambedkar. This festival is a way to create awareness of the life and words of Ambedkar

- Many activities create awareness in a more indirect way among people in India. Injustice is made visible during big manifestations and demonstrations, public opinion is influenced through articles in newspapers and poets will publish bundles that contain liberation poems.
- Awareness is created among Dalits and non-Dalits during meetings that vary from seminars with a few hundred participants to conventions where thousands of people gather. During these meetings experiences are shared, plans are made and demands are raised.
- Visits of Dalits abroad and foreigners visiting India create a possibility to make foreigners more aware of the situation of the Dalits. (See: Activate Dalit-support in the international community)

Ambedkar Yuga Declaration

A good example of creating awareness among Dalits is the declaration of the new millennium as Ambedkar Yuga. The Karnataka based Dalit-organization REDS along with the Dalit Jagruthi Samithi – a Dalit-movement supported by REDS – initiated the idea of declaring the new millennium Ambedkar Yuga. The declaration aimed at creating more awareness and acceptance among the Dalits that they are a people with their own history, culture and religion and that in the new millennium Ambedkar's philosophy and values are the guidance to Dalit-liberation.

In 18 months of preparation numerous promotional and awareness building programs were organized such as village meetings, cultural functions, cycle jathas, cadre training and consultations at

the state and South India level. A special book was written on the Ambedkar Era. The book describes the thousands of years of Brahminical onslaught on Dalits, the Dalit resistance and the Ambedkar Era that brings new hope.⁷⁷ Mr. M.C. Raj writes in this book: “Babasaheb is the leader of the whole world and not of the Dalits alone. Let the world prepare itself in this new era of self-respect, dignity, self-reliance, inclusiveness and unlimited freedom.”⁷⁸

The preparation culminated on 10 January 2000, in about 45,000 Dalits and others assembling in Tumkur, Karnataka, and declaring the new millennium as the Ambedkar Yuga. These Dalits came in hundreds of open trucks from remote villages and left an important day's work and income to support the declaration. Such a large gathering of Dalits and the presence of Mr. Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of Babasaheb Ambedkar, created history in Tumkur. Mr. Prakash Ambedkar declared the Third Millennium as the Ambedkar Yuga with high hopes. He said that in the next 1000 years, with Ambedkar's philosophy the Dalits have to write and create a new revolution. Mr Gopal Guru said he hoped that in the new Yuga a complete, permanent, genuine smile would be on the faces of the Dalit-people.⁷⁹

A concrete result of the impact of the Ambedkar Yuga declaration was the announcement of the Home Minister and the Social Welfare Minister of Karnataka – who were present at the declaration – to set up the first ever Special Court for cases of atrocities on Dalits in Tumkur district.⁸⁰ This has been subsequently set up.

Awareness-poems

Dalit poets use pronounced and penetrating words to create awareness.

Poem by unknown ex-soldier about untouchability

*Their houses are outside the village;
 There are lice in their women's hair;
 Naked children play in the rubbish;
 They eat carrion.
 The faces of the untouchables have a humble
 look;
 There is no leaning among them;
 They know the names of the village goddesses
 and the demon gods
 But not the name of Brahma*

Concluding part of Daya Pawar's poem 'Pai' (legs or feet)
about caste hierarchy

*The legs of those born from the feet
 Were snapped like green buds
 Everyone says: 'The safety of the pyramid is
 worth fifty legs.
 O come on, Bear a little pain'.*

Poem of Baburao Bagul about the need to enter the 'battlefield'
with courage

*Those who by mistake were born here
 should themselves correct this error
 by leaving the country! Or making war!
 They paint the pyramid's pinnacle.
 Your name is not mentioned*

Beginning of Waman Nimbalkar's poem 'Itihas' (history)
about the Manusmriti scriptures

*O heirs of Manu! For Millennia
 We have watched our own naked evening
 In half a dozen huts on the village boundary
 Our countless bodies have been burning, set afire
 by your feeble thoughts⁸¹*



Develop the Dalits economically

Economic development in this chapter means development taken up by the people, not by the government. Although the main responsibility and the main possibilities for economic uplift of the Dalits lay with the government, many people try to give some economic support to the Dalits. Mostly this is on a local level. This chapter describes why economic development is important and how the development takes place. The first paragraph gives a description of the most important economical issue of Dalits in the rural areas, the lack of land.

Lack of land

Land is for Dalits a vital issue in changing their poor economic situation. About three-fourth of all Dalits live in the rural areas. For them access to agricultural land for cultivation and capital for undertaking of non-farm self-employment is critical.⁸² Land is power in rural communities. While this relationship between land and power is universal, in the Indian context it is complicated by the play of caste. Almost as a rule, the lower castes in India, in particular the Dalits, are excluded from access to land—an exclusion which endows the dominant casts with enormous power and authority both in terms of caste and class. In many cases the dominant castes took the land from the Dalits in pre-colonial time.⁸³ The land that is now in possession of the Dalits is more often than not of a bad quality. In spite of the many land-reform-acts, an honest redistribution of land is still very far away because the interests of the dominant caste landlords are too big to guarantee proper implementation.⁸⁴ Without land, Dalits are completely dependent on the landlords for work as manual wage labourers. They have to work long hours, under bad conditions and against low wages. Often they have to take loans to be able to survive.⁸⁵ As a consequence extortion is common in the villages. Often Dalits can't pay

back loans and as a result have to work in bonded labour. If the landlords don't have work in the fields the Dalits will take up other underpaid, dangerous and heavy jobs. Or they move to the cities where they often end up in the slums.⁸⁶ To start their own business as an alternative is very difficult. First because nobody will lend them money and second because many people refuse to deal with a Dalit (they will not buy anything from a Dalit-entrepreneur).⁸⁷

Why economic development of Dalits is important

Improving the economic conditions will make Dalits less dependent on their oppressors. They will gain a better life that they can control themselves. Extortion and oppression will decrease as the level of economic dependency decreases. Economic development also means less poverty and a better welfare level. Dalits will get opportunities to give their families better food, housing, education and health-care. Economic independence creates self-respect (chin up, chest forward) and it helps in changing the identity of the Dalits. No longer the identity of a poor, landless labourer, who believes in fate ruling his life, but somebody who is proud to be a Dalit and who can independently support his/her family and the community.

Special economic programs of NGO's are necessary as a supplement to the governmental programs. The governmental programs are often insufficient or even not existent.

How people develop the Dalits economically

People who work outside the government system accomplish economic development in different ways. Some examples.

- Together with NGO's and people's movements the Dalits in the villages struggle to gain access to land or to get better and equal wages. Struggle means 'fighting' government officials

who refuse to implement land-reform-acts and who do not grant property-rights to Dalits of land that rightfully belongs to them. It also means fighting landlords who illegally occupy land of the Dalits and who pay low wages. (See: Seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights).

- NGO's have special programs to improve the economic situation of Dalits. For instance, they raise funds and find areas of distribution for Dalits who want to start their own enterprises. They also arrange financial assistance in the form of micro-credit systems. Micro-credits are savings that are turned into small loans that can be used by individuals or groups (often Self Help Groups) for specified purposes such as liable
- NGO's and institutes give trainings in entrepreneurship and craft-skills.
- Many organizations act as facilitators in helping the communities to become aware of the economic government schemes such as land distribution programs and in helping them to get benefit from them. The organizations help with collecting information, filling application forms and accompanying Dalits to various offices.
- On a small scale people try to improve their economic situation with inventive methods. Self Help Groups and Self Employment Programs are good examples of this. Self Help Groups are small groups of Dalits from the same village, often women. Every individual donates a certain amount of money each month. The money is gathered and then put in the bank. Next, the group members can take low interest loans. In advance the group decides for what goals loans will be granted. Loans are sometimes taken to finance joint enterprises. More often money is lend to individuals to pay for expenses in education and health care.

Self Employment Programs are small-scale activities of organizations to support Dalits who want to set up their own enterprises. Enterprises such as small-grocery or paan-beedi shops and plantations or orchards in dry-areas.⁸⁸

Integrating micro-finance in the Dalit empowerment process

In an innovative experimental project New Entity for Social Action (NESA), with the help of other organizations and networks, has succeeded in integrating the economic and political component of development into a holistic empowerment process.

In the project micro-finance was integrated in the Dalit empowerment process. The project was started because it became clear that in spite of the excellent work of development organizations in empowering Dalits through mobilization and organization, Dalits lacked sufficient finance for sustainable empowerment. Therefore it was decided that micro-finance should make advocacy, lobbying and campaigns possible for the Dalits who are otherwise incapable of helping in the empowerment process. NESA designed a program specifically for the poorest and most oppressed, the Dalit-women.

In the program that is called 'credit plus' groups of Dalit-women are trained on the subject of micro-finance while at the same time non-economic empowerment issues are addressed. After the training the women start saving 10 Rs. per week. During meetings the group leader will decide if loan requests are granted. One important condition is the optimum use of the money for empowerment. To promote the program specially selected Dalit-women are trained to become promoters of the program in the villages.

One organization using the program organized 421 Dalit women in 25 groups and is a good example of holistic empowerment. The women-groups have a total of Rs. 167.225 (about 4000 euro) in savings. Rs. 552.380 (about 13.000 euro) has been given out in 1126 loans. Rs. 346.505 (about 8200 euro) has been recovered. They have a 100% recovery. Because of the money that the women have saved they had the confidence to federate into a Dalit-women's federation. They take up campaigns more confidently now, which they could not do previously because they had to go back to ask for jobs from the same people they opposed.

NESA will keep on improving the program so more Dalit-women can benefit from it in the future.⁸⁹

Note: NESA is a network of 40 development organizations and networks in South-India that focuses on Dalit and Adivasi empowerment. The network is value based and upholds the principles of transparency, good governance, participatory and decentralized decision-making, and accountability.⁹⁰



Improve the social welfare status of Dalits

Social welfare contains a whole range of different components. Work, livelihood, health-care and education are important social welfare rights according to the International Covenant on Economical Social and Cultural rights. These rights consist of matters such as equal opportunities in work, good working conditions, sufficient food, clothing, housing, hygiene, health-care and education that is available for all in an adequate level. Social welfare is a segment of civil-society where only the government can play a significant role in making changes. People don't have enough (financial) means to be able to make large-scale improvements. But still, on a smaller scale people use different ways to improve the social welfare status of the Dalits. This chapter explains why improving their social welfare status helps the Dalits and it shows how the social welfare status is improved.

Current social welfare status of Dalits

At present Dalits are backward and have shortages in all components of social welfare. Poverty, unsufficient health-care, unequal payment, bad working conditions, lack of proper education, etc. Some facts:

- 2/3 of the Dalit population is illiterate. Female literacy is far behind male literacy.
- Dalit children have almost no access to proper private higher education, which has become the norm today.
- The drop out rate is very high. High drop-out rates among the Dalit-children creates an unequal opportunity structure and sows the seeds of low ability of Dalit Children which ultimately leads to social discrimination.⁹¹

- Dalits have separate wells in the villages as source of drinking water. The quality of the water is often considerably poorer than the general source in the village.
- Most Dalit-households in rural areas lack proper sanitation facilities.⁹²
- 88% of the pregnant mothers in rural areas - where most Dalis live – is anemic (weak/feeble due to lack of proper food). 40% of all children that die before their first birthday die because of malnutrition of the mother. Malnutrition of the mother also leads to low weight births and neurological complications with low IQ as a consequence.⁹³
- Dalits have to do the lowest and filthiest of jobs thinkable, manual scavenging:

“Narayanamma, 55 years, has been scavenging continuously for 19 years. She goes to the community dry toilet, which is 1 km from her house. She takes a bamboo basket and two small metal pieces, which she had left at the corner of the toilet...She has to clean 400 seats of dry toilet every day, having a load of 15-16 baskets of human excreta. Her health is ruined. She suffers from diarrhea and vomiting very frequently.”

Why improving their social welfare status helps the Dalits

Better education, more and better food, equal pay and better health-care are important conditions of life. They immediately improve the welfare level of the Dalits. At the same time a higher welfare level means Dalits will get their dignity back. It means they can live a more humane life with self-respect. This will give them confidence and power and it will make Dalits look at themselves as equals to others. Then they will start to demand a decent treatment from others as well.

“Knowledgeable citizens are the best investment against tyranny and abuse of power because they know what their rights are,” remarks Kofi Anan. Education is seen by many as the pillar of support for improving the situation of the Dalits. If Dalits want to stand up, to demand their rights and also to press for social change, the first thing they need is basic education.⁹⁴ Not only as a goal in itself but broader. A better education will make Dalits more aware, independent and knowledgeable of their situation and their rights. Education will give Dalits more opportunities to escape from their caste-dominated situation. Education will create possibilities to cross the boundaries of caste-based occupation/jobs and look for ‘not-caste-dominated’ jobs.⁹⁵ It will also make them conscious of their power.⁹⁶

Better working conditions will create better health and also enhances the ‘joy’ in work. This will reduce alcohol misuse.

Special social welfare programs of NGO’s are necessary as a supplement to the government-schemes, which are often insufficient, not existent or inefficient.⁹⁷

How people improve the social welfare status of Dalits

People who work outside the government system improve the social welfare situation of the Dalits in different ways. They often work on all marginalized sections of society and not specifically for the Dalits. A few examples are given in this paragraph.

- Many NGO’s have special programs on education, health, food and housing. Houses are built for Dalits and pumps and wells for clean water are installed. With health-care programs NGO’s give information and treatment. Special clinics are built and health workers visit the Dalits in the villages. Awareness camps and trainings are another part of these programs.

- To improve the education level of the Dalits special literacy-programs and adult education programs are developed. NGO's stimulate parents and children to allow the children to go to school instead of making them work in the fields. To support this, Dalit-schools are built in the Dalit-colonies. Private foundations have special schemes to help Dalits gain access to good private educational institutions.⁹⁸
- Special training and educational programs are developed to enhance the skills and the knowledge of the Dalit-leaders (see: Train the Dalits).
- Many organizations act as facilitators by helping the communities to become aware of the government social welfare schemes and to get benefit from them. The organizations help with information, filling application forms and accompanying them to various offices.
- In spite of all these special programs improving social welfare often ends up in a hard struggle. Government officials and dominant caste (employers) are pressurized by Dalits to gain better water, housing sites and better working conditions. Physical clashes are not uncommon during those struggles. Leaders of people's movements support the Dalits in these struggles.

Kanakuppe – struggle of Dalit women for drinking water

Kanakuppe, 1993. Kanakuppe is a high caste dominated village where the Dalits are only one-sixth of the high castes. The village has two mini-water tanks and two bore-wells for drinking water. One of the bore wells is in the Dalit-colony but it contains salt

water. The high caste people managed to construct both mini-water tanks in their own area. The tanks are given by the government for everybody to draw water but the Dalits were not allowed by the high castes to touch the taps because they would “pollute” them. Nor were they allowed to draw water from the bore-wells.

Unable to drink salt water and afraid to oppose the high castes, the Dalits had to draw water from the village pond where people went in the morning to wash their arse. The cattle also added their part of the pollution.

The women sangha was no more willing to put up with such inhuman treatment. During the celebration of Independence Day in the village one of the high caste teachers asserted during his speech that they all lived like brothers and sisters. The next morning the women quoted his speech and went to take water from one of the mini-tanks. The high-caste women scolded them but the Dalit women took all the water they needed. The next day the high caste people sent their children to shit all around the tank and the taps. The Dalit-women were patient; they washed the place and took water. That evening a high caste man removed the taps. Immediately 38 women and 8 men went to the Mandal head quarters and complained to the secretary. He came to the village, repaired the taps and waited till the Dalit-women had taken their water. That night the pipe leading to the tank was cut. So the Dalit women went to the bore well to get water, but high caste people prevented them from using it.

During a peace meeting (between high caste and Dalit-men) an agreement was reached that a separate pipe and tap (from the mini-tank) would be installed in the Dalit-colony. The Dalits would have to pay for half the installation costs. The Dalit-women refused to pay because they had every right to use the taps. If the high castes wanted separate taps, let them pay for it, or the government. The sangha-women prepared petitions for ministers, the collector

and police-officials. Before the women arrived back in the village the high caste people were ready with the pipes and the taps. They wanted to pay for it as long as the Dalits would not touch their taps any more.⁹⁹ So the Dalits finally got access to clean water because of the struggle of the Dalit-women.

Kanakuppe, 2002. The Dalits in Kanakuppe now have their own mini-tank with clean water in their part of the village.



Organize the Dalits

Organizing the Dalits means that Dalits start working together in a structured and planned way. The organizations that are founded are local, regional or national. They consist of village people, social activists, intellectuals and others. This chapter describes why and how Dalits are organized.

Why Dalits are organized

The first reason why Dalits work together in organizations is simply to shape processes where more than one person is involved. An organization is a framework that makes activities run effectively and in a structured way. Workplaces, a common goal, a way of work, division of tasks are all part of this framework.

Organizing the Dalits means that more Dalits will cooperate in the struggle. Many Dalits are willing to help in the Dalit-struggle but they can't or won't do this individually. If they join an organization a much wider front is formed against the oppressors. "Whenever the victims are properly organized and whenever they remain united in their struggle no power on earth can stop them from achieving their aspirations"¹⁰⁰

Organizations mean support and something to hold on to for the Dalits. They are places that Dalits can visit when they are in need of help.

By organizing the Dalits more Dalits get a chance to develop themselves. Leadership-qualities and skills are stimulated and created. These are opportunities Dalits don't often get in other organizations.

Dalit-organizations create new and more efficient models and processes of organizing (such as the participatory process) and this puts pressure on the 'official' organizations to perform better.

Founding local organizations such as sangha's and people's movements will establish a bottom-up approach in development in stead of a top-down approach that is often used. The members of local organizations know the local situation best and the small size of these organizations makes them flexible in their solutions.¹⁰¹ The bottom-up approach also enables the people to develop a sense of identity with the movement that supports the sangha's and it is a forum that creates equality and equal opportunity for women in communities.

Using a participatory model in sangha's and movements will have an enduring effect on people because it is developed by the people and for the people according to their context.¹⁰² It will create community spirit, feelings of pride and make them more independent.

Leaders are necessary to guide the local organizations in a structured way. Leaders also act as role models for other Dalits. Leaders who come from the villages are more accepted then 'outsiders'.¹⁰³

Forming self-governance systems for the Dalit-community can be very important to protect the rights of the Dalits, because the life and culture of Dalits is different and characterized by values of community in stead of based on the individual rights from the (western-styled) constitution.¹⁰⁴ Self-governance gives the Dalits an opportunity to meet, discuss, decide and make and enforce rules and plans in their own (communitarian) democratic context, without the dominant caste's interference.

How Dalits are organized

People who have certain visions and ideas about how to uplift the Dalits often use the strategy of organizing the Dalits. On various levels Dalits are organized in different kind of relationships. A few examples.

- Dalit-intellectuals are assembled in collectives. Collectives are platforms where intellectuals share ideas and spread their knowledge and experiences. As a part of these collectives intellectuals write books, publish articles, develop manifestos and lists of demands and create debates.
- Dalits in the villages are organized in sangha's or people's movements. These organizational forms often have the participatory model at their base. The participatory model means that Dalits in the villages study their situation themselves and they develop their own activities instead of having an external NGO do this for them.

Sangha's (which literally means the place where rivers come together) are groups of Dalits who live in the same village and who have united themselves with the common goal to improve the bad situation of the Dalits. In the sangha's problems are discussed, actions are developed and other villagers are motivated to give support.

People's movements are groups of Dalits that are formally or informally organized. They operate mostly on a regional level. These movements want to bring about either partial or total change in the Dalit-situation through collective mobilization that is based on an ideology. The people's movements are formed through conscientization and mobilization of the Dalits in certain regions. The movements press for Dalit-development, protest against their unequal and degraded status and seek justice for atrocities.¹⁰⁵

To structurize processes in sangha's and people's movements potential leaders are identified and trained.¹⁰⁶ Important roles the leaders have are those of organizer, trainer, problem-solver and motivator. Most leaders for Dalit organizations work as volunteers.

- In many communities Self Help Groups are founded. (See: Develop the Dalits economically)
- The forming of a local self-governance system for Dalits is another way of organizing the people in the villages. One example of a self-governance system is the formation of special Dalit Panchayats.
- Many NGO's are founded by Dalit-social activists. They use different organizational forms such as networks, foundations or federations.

Dalit Jagruti Samithi – people's movement in Karnataka

REDS (Rural Education for Development Society) initiated a Dalit-movement in Karnataka called the Dalit Jagruti Samithi (DJS). DJS was founded on January 10, 1995 in a big rally. DJS is a movement that stimulates the Dalits to decide, plan and take up action themselves. DJS has leaders at different levels (District, Taluk, Hobli and Village) that work every day among the Dalits in the villages. The emphasis lays on strengthening the Dalit-identity and Dalit rights through a well-developed Dalit ideology that is written down as Dalitology (see: Generate a Dalit counter-discourse). To successfully take up issues the leaders help the village people organize themselves in sangha's (see above) and lately in Dalit Panchayats (DPs). The DPs serve as forums of internal self-governance, where the Dalits resolve conflicts, discuss and take up action in a non-oppressing environment and in a democratic way. Contrary to the sangha's in DPs all Dalits in the village participate in the (political) process. The DPs successfully mobilize the people into a powerful force that fights the oppression of the Brahminical forces both in the society at large and in the government.

Officially DJS has now 15.000 members but the amount of Dalits

participating in the activities and struggles is many times this amount. DJS has founded 500 sangha's and the amount of Dalit Panchayats is steadily rising. The DJS leaders will help in transforming all the sangha's into DPs. The goal is to establish thousands of DPs at all levels.

With the help of the leaders the sangha's and Dalit Panchayats discuss and take up issues. They (re)claim illegally occupied land, search information, put pressure on government officials and dominant castes and file complaints. DJS has fought successfully against many forms of untouchability. Land has been given back to Dalits, houses were built and cases against atrocities were won.

To create awareness festivals with street theater, songs and dance are organized.

In the coming years a unique process will take place that will bring the power really to the people. The people's movement DJS will slowly but gradually reduce its work. Instead the Dalits in the villages will take up their own development through the self-governance of the Dalit Panchayats.¹⁰⁷

Note: REDS (Rural Education for Development Society) is a grass-root level organization that is based in Karnataka, South-India. It supports the struggle of the Dalit-people towards liberation from caste-oppression and establishment of Dalit Rights as Human Rights.



Empower the Dalits politically

Political empowerment of the Dalits means that Dalits start gaining more power in politics. They do this at all levels of Indian politics, from the local level of the village panchayats to the national level of the parliament. Political power is wielded directly by Dalits who become politicians or indirectly by Dalits who influence politicians. This chapter is about why Dalits need political power and how they obtain it. The chapter starts with a description of the current political power level of the Dalits, which is often more illusory than real.

Illusory political power

Political power is reserved for the Dalits in an attempt to create social advancement of the disadvantaged groups. In the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas Dalits have a constitutional right to a certain amount of reserved seats (resp. article 330 and 332 of the Indian Constitution). For the parliament in the Centre this means more than a hundred seats. This sounds very good but the constitutional provision turns out to contain only illusory power.

A consequence of the system of joint electorate is that many Dalit parliamentarians don't sit in parliament with a Dalit-agenda but they work for non-Dalit-parties such as the Congress and the BJP. These parliamentarians either share the ideologies of the ruling classes or they are co-opted and work compliantly for the broad party interests and not specifically for the Dalit-cause.

Another problem for Dalits in politics is that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are not accepted politically. Very few members of these groups are nominated for non-reserved seats and only a tiny number are elected.¹⁰⁸ Also, there are not enough

Dalits that have the high-education that is needed to fulfill the formal demands of the reserved jobs in politics. As a result many jobs stay empty.¹⁰⁹

The political power the Dalits do have is highly fractionalized.¹¹⁰ Being highly fractioned makes it very difficult to bargain with powers-that-be.¹¹¹

The big critique on the icons of Dalit-inspiration in politics like Mayawati is that they have so far focused their energy and attention more on acquiring the seat of power than on actually helping the Dalits.

Why political empowerment is important

Ambedkar in 1933 said: “You have now a way of bringing about change, an improvement in your life conditions. That way is through political action, through appropriate laws....you can make (the) government provide for you what you are now denied...Hence in stead of resorting to rosary counting or prayer you should depend on the political path; that will bring you liberation.”¹¹²

According to many people political power is essential for Dalits if they want to make fundamental changes. In general, political power means that Dalits can take part in discussions in the political arena and have a vote in the decision-making. They can influence policy-development and they can put into effect certain legislation that is beneficial for Dalits. This can create an enormous difference for Dalits. No longer is everything decided behind their backs but they are themselves actively involved in policy making. Not as a passive voter in a vote-bank or with Dalit-puppets of the Congress and BJP-party in parliament but with a direct voice in changes. With sufficient power Dalits can form a block that can force implementation of laws and legislation that up till now were never

implemented. A block on its own but also as a balancing block between rival factions to get support for the Dalit-cause in return. ¹¹³

On the local - Panchayat Raj - level political power means influence on implementation of beneficial government schemes such as the allotment of housing sites and land. Also Dalit politicians can give contracts for certain government works to Dalits. From the Panchayat Raj elections new Dalit-leadership emerges and it is an opportunity for social mobility. ¹¹⁴

For Dalits in general but for Dalit-women in particular being elected at one or another level in the decision-making bodies gives courage, political assertion and is an example to others. It will change the identity of the Dalit in question and the ones who are related to this person. No longer the identity of an inferiority complex, being powerless and believing in being unequal, but the identity of being proud to be a Dalit, believing that you are equal and have the right to power and the right to use it.

Founding political parties gives Dalits their own space in the political field. An independent Dalit-party means an independent political identity, which will increase 'real' political power in contrast to the illusionary power. If Dalits have their own party they no longer have to vote for the parties that gives false promises and only use them as vote-banks. An own Dalit-party can raise Dalit-issues much quicker without having the trouble of the party policy that obstructs any effective action.

How political empowerment is achieved

Dalits strive for and slowly reach more 'real' political power. This paragraph describes some important methods that Dalits use to achieve political power.

- The most important way for Dalits to get direct access to political power is when Dalits who really work for the Dalit-cause are able to occupy seats in local and national parliaments and obtain posts as Panchayat-president, (chief-)ministers and high bureaucrats.
- Founding political parties is another way to gain political power. Electoral mobilization is used as a tool to get the necessary votes that will enable the party to occupy an amount of seats that gives sufficient influence on policy making. Dalit-parties form strategic alliances with other parties. This is necessary because Dalit-parties often don't have a majority on their own. The best well-known current example of a Dalit political party is the BSP-party in Uttar Pradesh (see example below).
- NGO's have special programs for Dalits who want to gain political power on a local level. They support and train those Dalits so they get elected in the Panchayat Raj.
- Dalits also get political power in more indirect ways. The best example of this is the political lobby and advocacy. More and more Dalits use the instrument of the pressure lobby to influence politicians and high government officials.
- Another option to get access to political power is to organize informal and formal meetings between Dalits and the government. (See: Cooperate in the Dalit struggle)

Bahujan Samaj Party and Mayawati

The Bahujan Samaj party (BSP) and Mayawati are well known examples of Dalit political empowerment. The BSP was formed in 1984. It was a political expression of a social action movement

that was established by Kanshi Ram in the late 1960's. The BSP is an 'Ambedkarite' party that is based on the writings and teachings of Ambedkar. It was formed as a party with the aim to capture power and use it to improve the condition of the SC community.

The BSP party has slowly been increasing its strength at the state and, to a lesser extent, the national level. One effort to gain more power was to include Backward Castes, Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Tribes and religious minorities in its political agenda from the early 1990's. Another move to gain power (which has brought a storm of protest and critique from many Dalits) was the BSP party moving closer to BJP and Congress for alliances.

The increase in strength culminated in the BSP becoming the second largest party after the regional SP party, and the biggest national party, in the 2002 UP-elections.¹¹⁵ Another outcome was the Dalit woman Mayawati becoming Chief-Minister. For many people the major contradiction (for the Dalit-cause) was that the BSP again formed a coalition with the BJP party (that upholds the wish for India to become a Hindutva-nation). But in spite of this Mayawati and the BSP party now have the necessary amount of political power to make changes for the Dalits in UP, and that is exactly what they are doing (although there is a lot of critique that the BSP lacks clear ideology and program and has not done enough). In the fields of education, social welfare and employment generation they implement programs of Dalit upliftment.¹¹⁶

Mayawati has founded a special Ambedkar-park, she has appointed new Dalit-officials and she helps the Dalits to get grants from the government for constructing infrastructure and social welfare activities.¹¹⁷ Equally important is the fact that Brahmins now have to take orders from a Dalit-woman.¹¹⁸ And last but not least Mayawati is an example for the Dalits, especially the Dalit-women.

Bhopal Declaration

The Bhopal Declaration is an example of Dalits wielding indirect political power. At the Bhopal Dalit conference on January 12/13, 2002 in Madhya Pradesh, leading Dalit-intellectuals, activists and their fellow travelers came together. They represented diverse strands of opinion within the Dalit-movement. At the conference, for the first time in history of democratic experimentation in India, with the total involvement of the state Chief-Minister, a Dalit-agenda was prepared for socio-economic reform of the Indian state and civil society.

At the base of the deliberations was the Bhopal document, an agenda for socio-economic change that seeks to lay its claim on a share in the countries resources, assets and institutions. The result of the conference was the 'Bhopal Declaration' that consists of a list of 21 demands among which are demands for land distribution and the democratization of capital.

One of the concrete results of the conference was the promise made by the Chief Minister that the State of Madhya Pradesh shall make 30 per cent of its purchases from Dalit and tribal business establishments.¹¹⁹

Another example of the political power that resulted from the conference is that the BSP party (that opposed the conference) will not be able to ignore the long-term implications of the Bhopal Declaration because it has spelt out a concrete economic agenda for the future, which has been singularly absent in BSP politics so far.¹²⁰



Seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights

“Dalit-rights are human rights”. Unfortunately too often those Dalit rights are violated. To correct those wrongs, Dalits (sometimes with the help of others) seek justice. They seek justice through the legal system but also through direct confrontations with the violators or others that might be able to help them.

This chapter shows why it is helpful for the Dalits to seek justice. It also describes some instruments on how justice is sought.

Getting justice is difficult for Dalits

Seeking and getting justice for human rights violations is a difficult task for Dalits. The very small amount (1%) of cases that actually leads to a conviction is proof enough. From all sides and in many ways Dalits are opposed. Violators (mostly from dominant castes) influence the Dalits, because they want to withhold them from filing cases with the police. They threaten the Dalits and they use physical force against the victim and his/her family.

Dependency withholds Dalits from filing cases against dominant caste people that commit atrocities on them. Dalits are very much dependent on dominant caste people, who supply income for them as landlords.

Police and other authorities are often in league with the violators. Police officials refuse to register the case or they falsify the facts. Senior officers do not promptly visit the place of the incident nor do they take up the investigation immediately. In cases of rape the victims are not subjected to medical examinations immediately.

Investigations prolong for years for flimsy reasons like non-availability of medical reports, caste certificates and failure to find witnesses. In most of the cases the investigating officers have failed to add Section 3 of SCs/STs PAA Act. This means the offence will not be considered an atrocity and enables the accused to be released and deprives the victim of some relief under the act.¹²¹

Judges are almost always of dominant castes and many of them use every trick they know to prevent Dalits from getting justice. For example a man who raped a Dalit-women was found not guilty because regarding to the judge the woman was too ugly to be raped.

Why seeking justice helps the Dalits

Seeking and getting justice through the legal system is an opportunity for the victims to straighten injustice. It creates jurisprudence that can be used by other Dalits, and successful lawsuits act as a precedent. They show that justice is possible, which is something that might give other Dalits the courage to file a case and go to court.

Seeking justice in a pro-active way – not to wait till the government starts acting on violations - is important. Seeking justice in a pro-active way means putting pressure on violators and people who can offer solutions. Without influencing these people Dalits will not get justice because many people won't help the Dalits out of their own.

By using (physical) pressure Dalits show they no longer allow others to fool them around. They show that they are aware of the injustice that is done to them and they show they are prepared to fight for their rights. This will refrain some from committing crimes a next time. Unfortunately it also creates more violent counter-reactions.

Activities such as rallies, roadblocks and processions are important for influencing public opinion and for attracting public attention to cases.

How people seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights

People use different instruments to seek justice for violations of Dalit-rights. To seek justice Dalits either use the legal system or they put pressure on those people that are directly or indirectly responsible for the violations or are capable of offering solutions. Some of the important instruments are described in this paragraph.

- Pressure is created by organizing rallies, dharnas (sit down protests), roadblocks, demonstrations and processions in front of police stations, parliaments and in the streets where violators (often dominant caste people) live.
- Intellectuals and social activists create pressure by composing documents such as declarations, petitions, memorandums and manifestos that are presented to politicians and government officials. In these documents descriptions of unjustifiable situations are followed by lists of demands (see example below). By collecting many autographs under these documents more 'weight' is given to them.
- To seek justice Dalits sometimes look for physical confrontations. Not only to cool their anger and frustration but also to warn dominant castes not to commit atrocities again, or to force them into cooperation.
- When there is a dispute about land Dalits will often physically occupy that piece of land.

- Dalits more and more demonstratively reject and refuse to take part in any activity that is humiliating to them and violates their rights.¹²² They refuse to do activities such as having to sit outside the dominant caste house when invited for a meal or removing dead cattle as free labour.
- Hunger strikes are organized to get attention for a problem and to put pressure on others to help the Dalits.
- Dalits seek 'official' justice through the legal system (often different ways are combined). When a violation occurs the victims or representatives of the victims will go to the police station to have the case registered. Often they go in large groups to make a bigger impression on the officials. If police officials refuse to register the case (which happens all too often) the Dalits will petition with the commissioner of police or with higher bureaucrats and politicians.
- NGO's and people's movements help the victims with independent research into the case, legal aid and pressure tactics.

Lingikatte, struggle to (re)claim possession of land

From 1952-1955 the government distributed 260 acres of land to the Dalits of the small Dalit-colony of Karadigere Kaval Lingikatte. After distribution the Dalits leveled the land and cultivated it.

The landlords – because they thought Dalits should not possess such good land – laid their claim on the lands of the Dalits. They appealed to the government and filed cases in court.

In 1993 REDS and the people's movement DJS (see: Organize the Dalits) took up the task of helping the Dalits (re)gain possession of their land. With the help of their lawyer REDS made numerous counter appeals to the government and gave strong opposition to the landlords in court. One of the victories was the High Court of Karnataka granting a Stay Order to the Dalits in 1994. This meant that till the final verdict nobody good touch their land. During all this administrative 'warfare' the Dalits in Lingikatte did not move under the dominant caste pressure and stayed on their land.

In 1998, caste Hindus put up fencing around the entire Dalit-land. The Dalits were not prepared to accept this. They asked the police to remove the fence but the police did not respond. So after three months of waiting in vain the people's movement DJS organized a solidarity meeting in the village. There the people decided to bundle their strength with people from neighboring villages. On one of the following nights a large group of Dalits from different villages went to the Dalit land and removed the fence. They retook possession of their lands and they still hold it up till this date.

In 2002 most of the Dalits have official documents that the land is theirs. For a few the struggle is not yet over.

List of Demands from National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights

Part of the list of demands from National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, which was presented to politicians all over India and abroad in 1999. (See: Cooperate in the Dalit-struggle)

We demand that the Government of India

- Recognize that "Dalit Rights are human rights"

- Place a white paper in parliament on the atrocities against Dalits and Reservation Facilities actually granted to Dalits from 1947
- Restore to Dalits all the land that has been taken away from the Dalit community and distribute to each Dalit family at least 5 acres of cultivable land.
- Effectively implement in spirit and action, the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989) and Rules (1995) in all states and transfer the responsibility of implementation of the Act to the National SC/ST commission.

We demand that the International Human Rights Community

- Recognize that “Dalit Rights are human rights”.
- Undertake a global effort to abolish untouchability in Asia, and consider its practice a heinous crime against humanity punishable in the severest form possible.

We demand that the United Nations

- Recognize that “Dalit rights are human rights”
- Appoint a special rapporteur or working group on the practice of untouchability in Asia. ¹²³



Train the Dalits

Training the Dalits means teaching and instructing Dalits and others to better prepare them for their work in the Dalit-struggle. This chapter explains why training helps the Dalits and it shows how people are trained.

Why training helps the Dalits

Training Dalits is necessary to develop among them the latent potentials, which are essential for working successfully in the struggle.

Leadership-training equips Dalit-leaders with the competence to organize and support the Dalits in the villages. Training gives Dalit-leaders inspiration and self-confidence as well as the necessary capacities in the form of knowledge and skills. Leaders have legal and socio-cultural knowledge so they know how to react to atrocities. They possess skills such as music making and street theater because with those skills leaders are able to use the right media to communicate with the villagers.

With the use of trainings the identity of Dalits can be strengthened. Training also gives self-respect and a feeling of pride to a Dalit and his/her environment.¹²⁴

Training not only outfits Dalits better in their work as Dalit-leaders but it can also be important for their future employment.

Not only the training of Dalits is useful, also the training of non-Dalits who work for NGO's is helpful. Through trainings those people learn more about the Dalit situation and that will make them better equipped to support the Dalit struggle.

How people are trained

Many organizations train people who are dedicated to the Dalit cause. Some initiatives are described in this paragraph.

- Much training is given to young Dalits. They follow trainings to obtain the necessary skills and knowledge to become the leaders of people's movements. Knowledge that is taught includes social relations of groups, norms and values, human rights, politics and the legal system. Skills that are trained include public speaking, leadership, singing, street theater and documentation.
- Other people who want to help the Dalits are also trained. Employers of NGO's follow courses in training institutes and go for exposure to Dalit organizations. They learn about rural life in the Dalit-colonies, the history of the Dalits, reasons behind atrocities, and the social systems in India.
- The leaders of the people's movements and employers of NGO's train the local people in the villages. They give trainings in health-care, personal hygiene, entrepreneurship and they teach skills such as pottery and embroidery.

Human Potential Development for Dalits training

Twice a year the Ambedkar Resource Center of REDS (Rural Education for Development Society) gives a four months Human Potential Development training to Dalit-youth (HPD-D training). The main goal of the HPD-D training is to develop a value-based leadership among the Dalits. After the training the participating Dalit youth are expected to become leaders who take up the issues of the Dalit-people in their respective villages.

To select potential leaders for the training interviews and group discussions are conducted in the villages. Importance is not given to educational qualifications but to leadership quality and the desire to keep living in the villages after the training.

The HPD-D training does not use the conventional training methodologies where the trainer hands over knowledge to the trainees in one-way communication. In stead it uses the Participatory Training Methodology (PTM). PTM is derived from a development vision that believes that the marginalized have the inert potential and the right de determine the course of history themselves. In short, PTM means that the existing potentials of the trainees are used as the main resource for enhancing and strengthening the necessary values, knowledge and skills. This means not one-way trainer-trainee communication but active involvement of the trainee in its own development in contact with the other members of the group. The trainer is more on the background in the role of facilitator.

Next to personal development, concrete skills that are acquired by the Dalit-youth are organizing capacities, public speech, planning, monitoring and streetplay. Their knowledge base is enhanced on subjects as the socio-legal systems in India, Ambedkarism and women issues.¹²⁵

In recent years the HPD-D training has been given to hundreds of Dalit-youth in the Tumkur district of Karnataka (South-India). Capable leaders have emerged who at this very moment work among the Dalits in the villages, organizing, educating and agitating them.

Note: REDS (Rural Education for Development Society) is a grass-root level organization that is based in Karnataka, South-India. It supports the struggle of the Dalit-people towards liberation from caste-oppression and establishment of Dalit Rights as Human Rights.

End of part two

Part three

Concluding remarks

Concluding remarks

This booklet described the Dalits and their struggle for a society where liberty, fraternity and equality are more than a promise. The first and second part of the booklet show that the Dalits may yet have long road to go but it also makes very clear that the Dalits have started to resist oppression and are now fighting for their rights. In this chapter some concluding remarks will be made.

The first part of the booklet described the Dalits and the situation they are in. The Dalits as descendants of the indigenous people that lived in India at the time of the Aryan invasion. The indigenous people who in the course of time became oppressed and were named 'untouchables' and Scheduled Castes. The people that started to name themselves 'Dalits' from the middle of the twentieth-century. A name for a group of 240 million people that has been resilient for a long time but that is now building its strength and fighting back the oppression.

Fighting back the oppression of the Dalits means that people have started to put pressure on the government to make changes or they started creating the necessary changes themselves. The twelve chapters in part two of the booklet show that many different methods have been developed to change the lives of the Dalits. From the local to the international level and from abstract to concrete, many different individuals and groups of people now use a variety of strategies, instruments and mechanisms.

Some of the strategies will lead to direct changes – such as economic development – and some of them are part of a long-term process of change – such as changing the identity of the Dalits. The instruments and mechanisms give hands and feet to the strategies. Not all of them have been described in the book but

the ones that are described show that many different people and organizations use their qualities to work for the Dalit cause. The concrete examples make very clear that it is not a marginal and fruitless effort. Many victories have been won and the lives of many Dalits have changed in a positive way because of the use of 'people's strategies for change'.

Don't despair

This day will depart too

Now, this day is pregnant with day

Our day is not far away

*Look, from the day is born the day*¹²⁶



*All profits if this booklet will contribute to
the founding of the*

Booshakthi Kendra

International Dalit Cultural Center

The future mission of REDS vis-à-vis the Dalit communities will be fulfilled through the Booshakthi Kendra, which will also be known as the International Dalit Cultural Center.

It is visualized that this Booshakthi Kendra will become the nerve center of the internal organization of the Dalit communities based on the normative order and normative standard that has been laid out in the book Dalitology (see chapter 'Generate a Dalit counter-discourse' in this book). A small community of Dalits together with Mr. M.C. Raj and Mrs. Jyothiraj – the founders of REDS – will share the experience and knowledge that they have gained till now to keep creating the necessary platform for the empowering of Dalit communities for a few more generations to come.

Such a strengthening will on the one hand give a strong community identity to the different groups of the Dalit-world. Based on this strength that is gained out of the assertions of Dalit-history and culture, the Dalit-world will make deep inroads into the democratic institutions of this country, so as to infuse a strong value base within the systems of governance. In order to do this the people in the Booshakthi Kendra will draw inspiration, energy and strength from Mother Earth and from the waves of ancestors.

All people who aspire for a world full of love, tolerance, resilience, liberty, fraternity and equality will find the relevance of Booshakthi Kendra. For the Dalit people it will become a heritage that they aspired for but were never allowed to have.

Regular Activities of Booshakthi Kendra will be 1. Weekend Lectures; 2. A Gossip Center; 3. A Personality Development Center with Counseling; 4. A Space for Individual Silence and Solitude; 5. A Small Library; 6. Two Years Live-in-Training; 7. A Witnessing Community.

It is planned to set up and run this International Dalit Cultural Center through contributions from individuals, institutions and organizations. An area of 8 acres of land is already available at the National Highway 4.

The contact-address of REDS can be found at the second page of this book.

Note: REDS (Rural Education for Development Society) is a grass-root level organization that is based in Karnataka, South-India. It supports the struggle of the Dalit-people towards liberation from caste-oppression and establishment of Dalit Rights as Human Rights.

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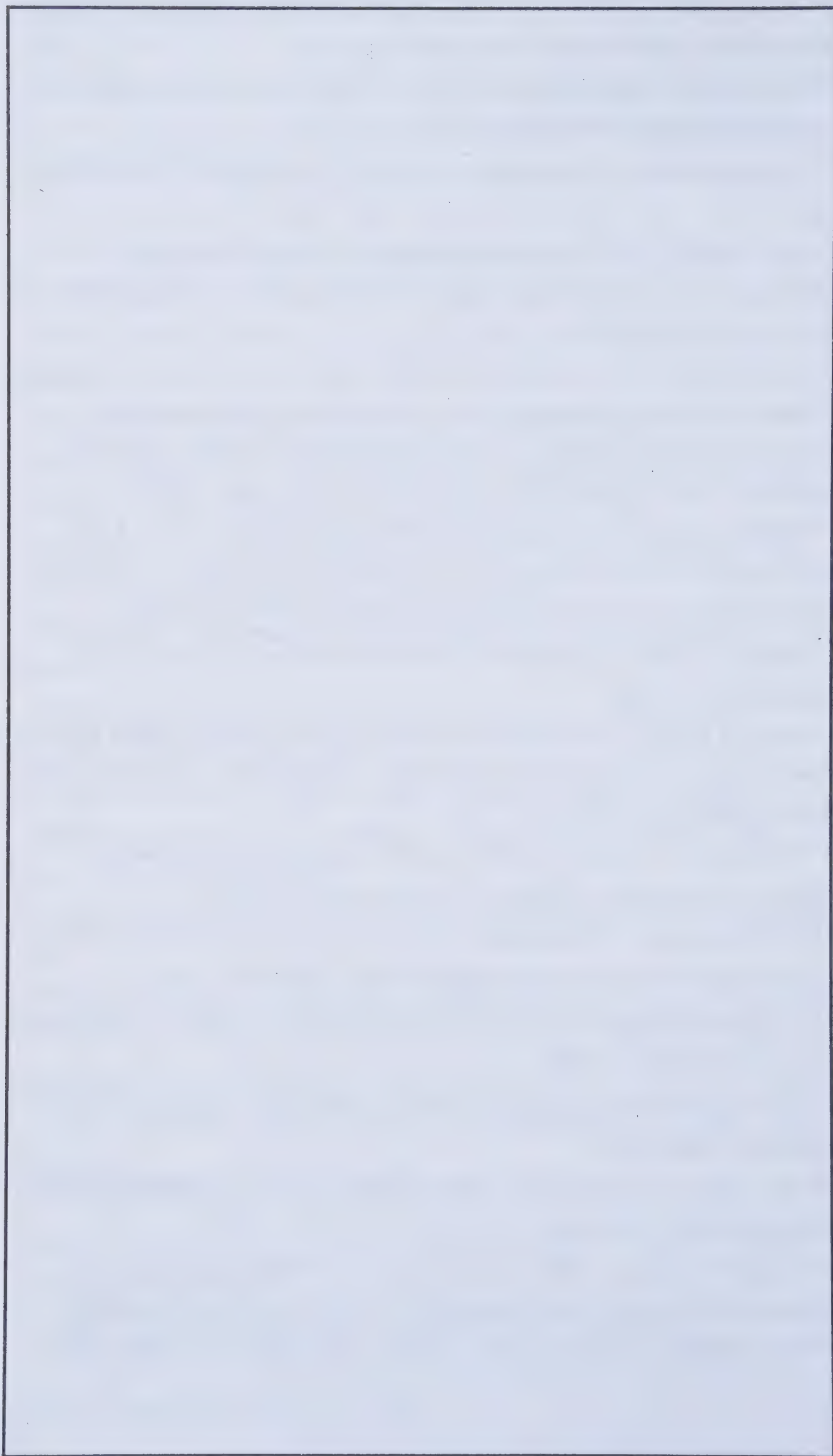
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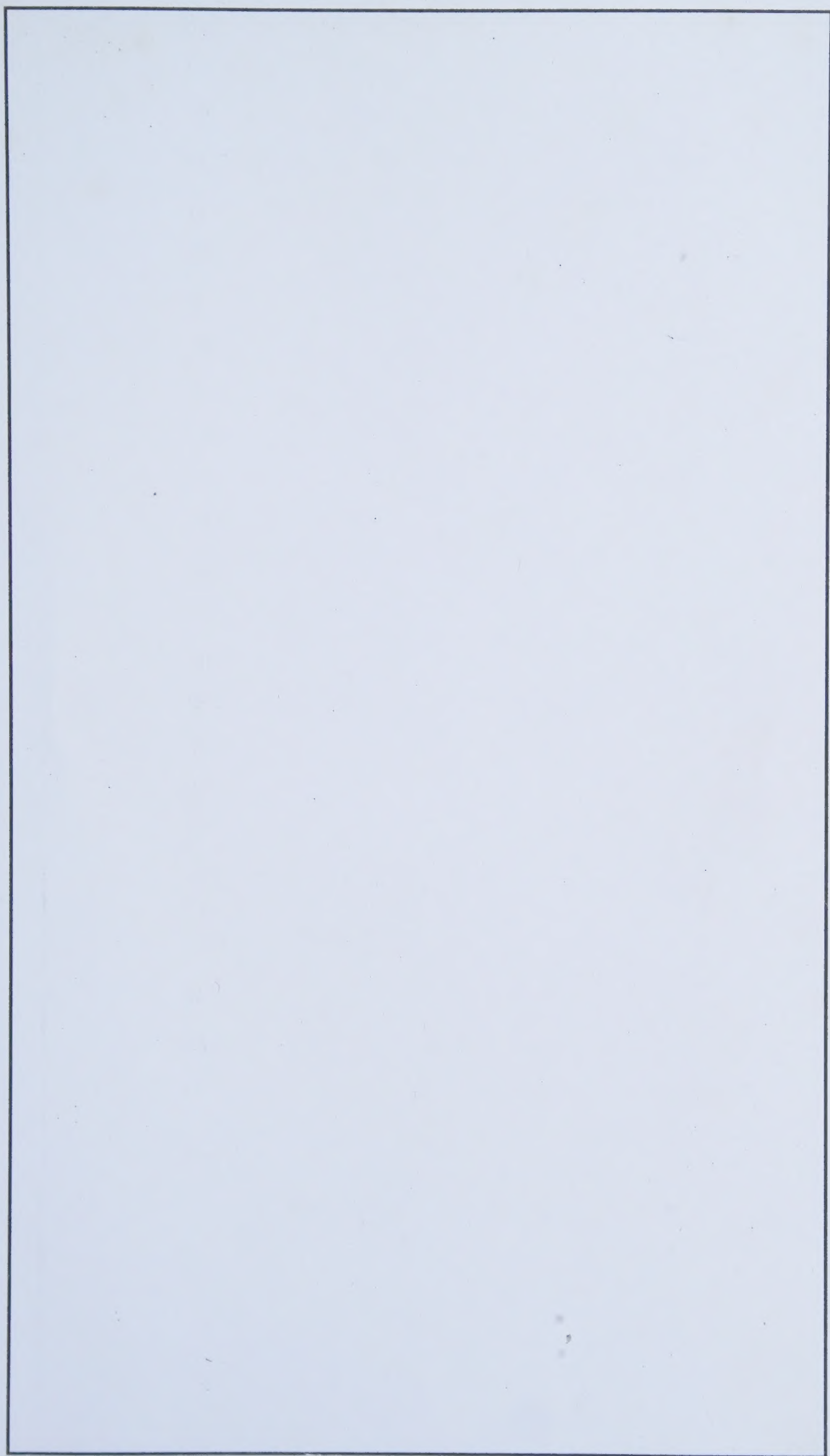
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Why are human rights of 240 million Dalits still violated in India?

How do people fight for Dalit-rights?

For more than three thousand years the Dalits in India have been the victims of oppression. Their dignity is taken from them and their rights are systematically violated. However, in recent times people have begun to take up action for the Dalits with the aim to create a better society. A society based on the principles of liberty and equality. This book is about those people and their actions.

This book offers an appraisal of the Dalit-struggle for dignity and rights. Part one of the book contains a review of the Dalit-situation. It exposes the vast gap between the promise of human rights and the practice of ongoing violations. Part two is about the people who decided to fight back. This part shows the results of a study on 'people's strategies for change'. It describes how individuals and organizations fight against the oppression with various strategies. Strategies such as:

- Activate Dalit-support in the international community
- Change the identity of the Dalits
- Generate a Dalit counter-discourse

Social activists, intellectuals and others transform these strategies from theory into practice through a wide variety of instruments and mechanisms, such as rallies, pressure lobbies, protest songs, trainings, micro-credit systems, networking and many more.

Numerous concrete examples show that the efforts of the people to help the Dalits are crucial as well as successful. The lives of many Dalits have changed in a positive way because of the 'people's strategies for change'.

This book is particularly written for everybody who is yet an outsider in the Dalit-struggle but who wants to become a participant. It will give those people a useful overview of the different methods others and they themselves can use to support the Dalit-cause. For the people who already work for the Dalits this book might generate ideas for new strategies and activities.

Dave Hardy studied law in the Netherlands. During his work for Amnesty International he first learned about the Dalits. He stayed in South-India to study and experience the fight for Dalit-rights.